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STEVE KLEIN

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JUST AN OLD, SWEET SONG

Adam Levy plays and sings our arrangement of Ray Charles' classic take on "Georgia on My Mind." (p. 64)



DYNAMIC ARRANGING

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MARTIN SC-13E

An innovative new design from the iconic maker. (p. 82)



"I WILL"

Laurence Juber's fab approach to a Beatles gem. (p. 94)

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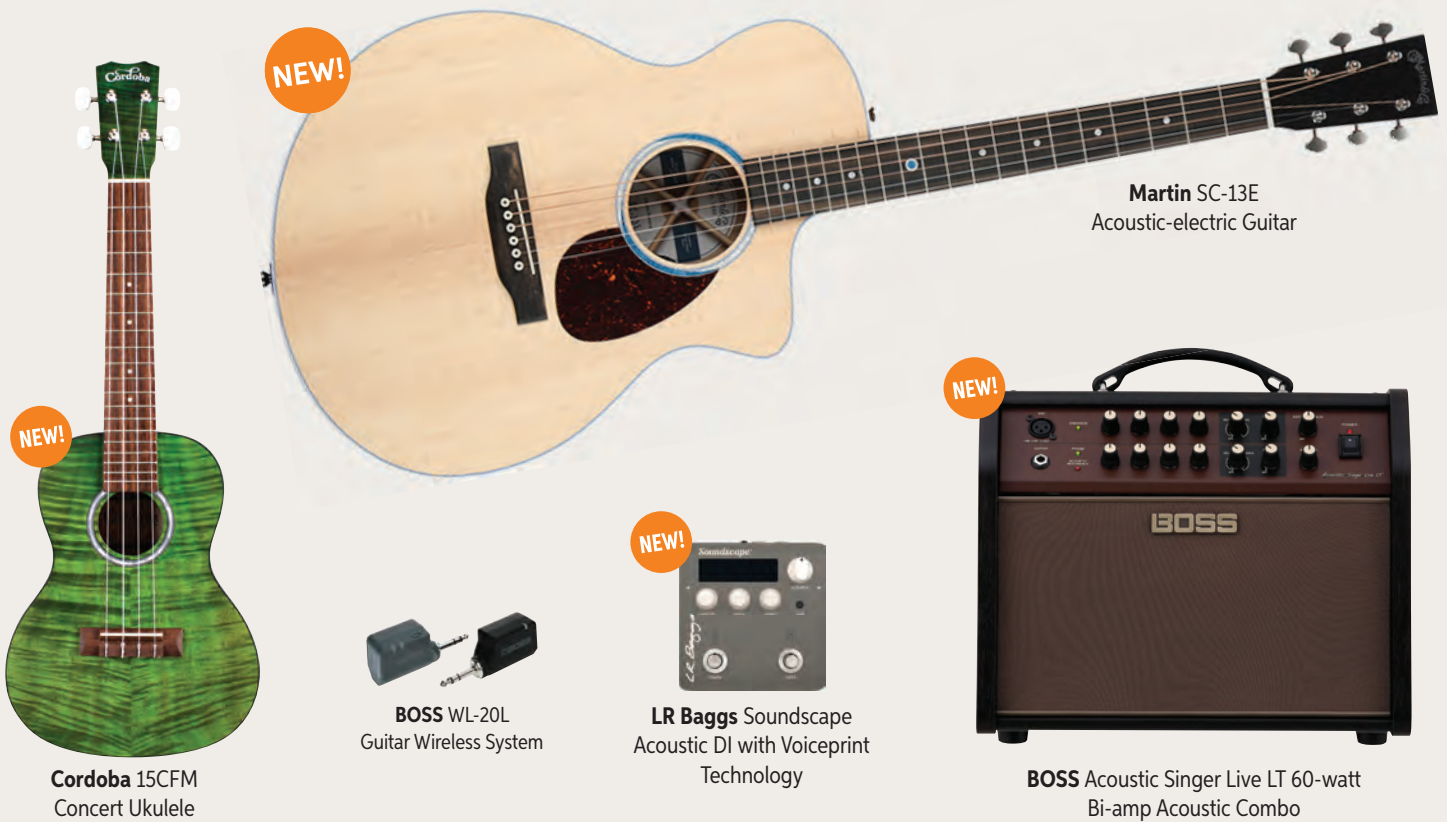
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THE FRONT PORCH

Alex de Grassi



GIORGIO FAIRSONI

When we began working on this issue in mid-March, we encountered a conundrum as a shelter-in-place order was called in the San Francisco Bay Area, where *AG* is headquartered. We had never put together a magazine with our office shuttered, and the situation felt far from ideal, given the close collaboration between staff, contributors, and artists required of each issue—not to mention that many of us suddenly became homeschooling parents.

I'm happy to report that, thanks to the magic of videoconferencing and working in the cloud—and more important, the dedication of our editors and writers—we were able to produce the July/August issue without a hitch. The odds were not necessarily in our favor, especially considering that we had planned to film one of our main features, a private lesson with Alex de Grassi, in *AG*'s studio in April. But de Grassi, ever the consummate pro, rose to the occasion and filmed the examples himself in his home studio.

In that lesson, de Grassi demonstrates selections from *The Bridge*, his first solo album in 17 years. Among other things, he explains his idiosyncratic interpretation of "Shenandoah," in which he infuses this traditional North American folk song with Middle Eastern and modern jazz elements. It's an interesting contrast with singer-songwriter Maurice Tani's more straightforward—but no less appealing—arrangement in this issue's Campfire department.

And speaking of arrangements, the issue includes several other good ones, covering plenty of stylistic territory. There's John Fahey's take on the traditional gospel number "Uncloudy

Day," with performance notes and video by Welsh guitarist Gwenifer Raymond, and Laurence Juber's new interpretation of Paul McCartney's "I Will," which the fingerstyle virtuoso was kind enough to film in his home studio for *AG*'s website. Jamie Stillway worked up an arrangement of the Delmore Brothers' classic recording of "Wabash Blues" for two guitars, and she provided a terrific video with her frequent duo partner, Eric Skye. By popular request, I notated Ray Charles' classic recording of "Georgia" for guitar and voice, and convinced guitar ace Adam Levy to record it for us. (Trust my family—you don't want to hear me sing.)

It feels like years ago when we were at the 2020 Winter NAMM show, a bustling event attended by more than 100,000 music-industry professionals from around the world, checking out so much new gear. Among the guitars that stood out were the SC-13E, an innovative acoustic-electric unlike anything C.F. Martin & Company has ever produced, and the 001 14-Fret, Collings Guitars' first new body style in years. Luckily, we were able to review both instruments in depth, with the usual video demos on the website.

I hope that you'll enjoy this issue in good health, and if you're still social distancing, will find plenty useful information to hunker down with on your instrument. As always, feel free to reach out to let me know what you think of the magazine.

—Adam Perlmutter

Adam.Permutter@Stringletter.com

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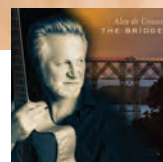
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FEEDBACK

INFLUENCES AND INSPIRATIONS

In the May/June issue, we asked readers to tell us about the performance/recording that had the most influence on them as players and lovers of acoustic music. Here are some of the responses.

When I saw this issue's question, my mind immediately went to Florian Opahle's acoustic performance on "Take a Pebble" from Greg Lake's *Greg Lake Live* DVD. Every time I watch it, I wish Segovia could have seen it!

—Bob Bonar, Latrobe, PA

That's easy for me. Jorma Kaukonen. Just about anything he has ever done. But to narrow it down to a single song: "Embryonic Journey" (on Jefferson Airplane's *Surrealistic Pillow*). And "Water Song" (from Hot Tuna's *Burgers*). Yes, I know that's two. "Embryonic Journey" was performed by a good friend (perfectly, I may add) at my wedding in 1982 as the wedding march. That's impact.

—Larry Diamond, via email

As a teenager in the 1960s my older brother used to take me to the MSG, a folk/blues club in Manchester [UK]. One evening, on ascending the stairs, I heard the most amazing, powerful female blues voice and compelling guitar. "That must be a lady of—shall we say—substantial physical stature to have a voice like that," I thought. On entering the room, I was stunned to see a diminutive woman with long, fair hair and "John Lennon" glasses hunched over a huge guitar. It was the wonderful Jo Ann Kelly. Her voice and driving rhythmic blues licks opened my eyes to what was possible on an acoustic guitar. Subsequently I was fortunate to see some great players from the U.S., including the incredible Reverend Gary Davis on his last visit to the UK in 1971, but the impact of that first eye-opening experience of voice and acoustic blues guitar remains with me.

—Hugh Taylor, Wales, UK

"Lonely People" by America. I was 13 and rode my bike to the guitar store to buy an Epiphone FT-120 so I could learn how to play it. It's the intro that really stands out.

—John Flato, via email

In the mid-'60s I heard a voice/guitar recording of Patrick Sky singing his song "Many a Mile." I never recovered. I had to learn to do that. And I did.

—David Motley Moneta, VA

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

I know that AG has been adapting to a changing landscape even before the pandemic. I just

wanted to compliment you on the generous amount of notation/tablature you've included in recent issues. This keeps the magazine attractive to electric guitarists like me, who barely even play acoustic. I've subscribed for years, just to catch any arrangements you publish by Sean McGowan—and anything else is gravy. Finding something like Charlie Byrd's "The Girl from Ipanema" arrangement in the May/June issue is a real treat. I just hope we aren't defiling the magazine for acoustic purists by reading it.

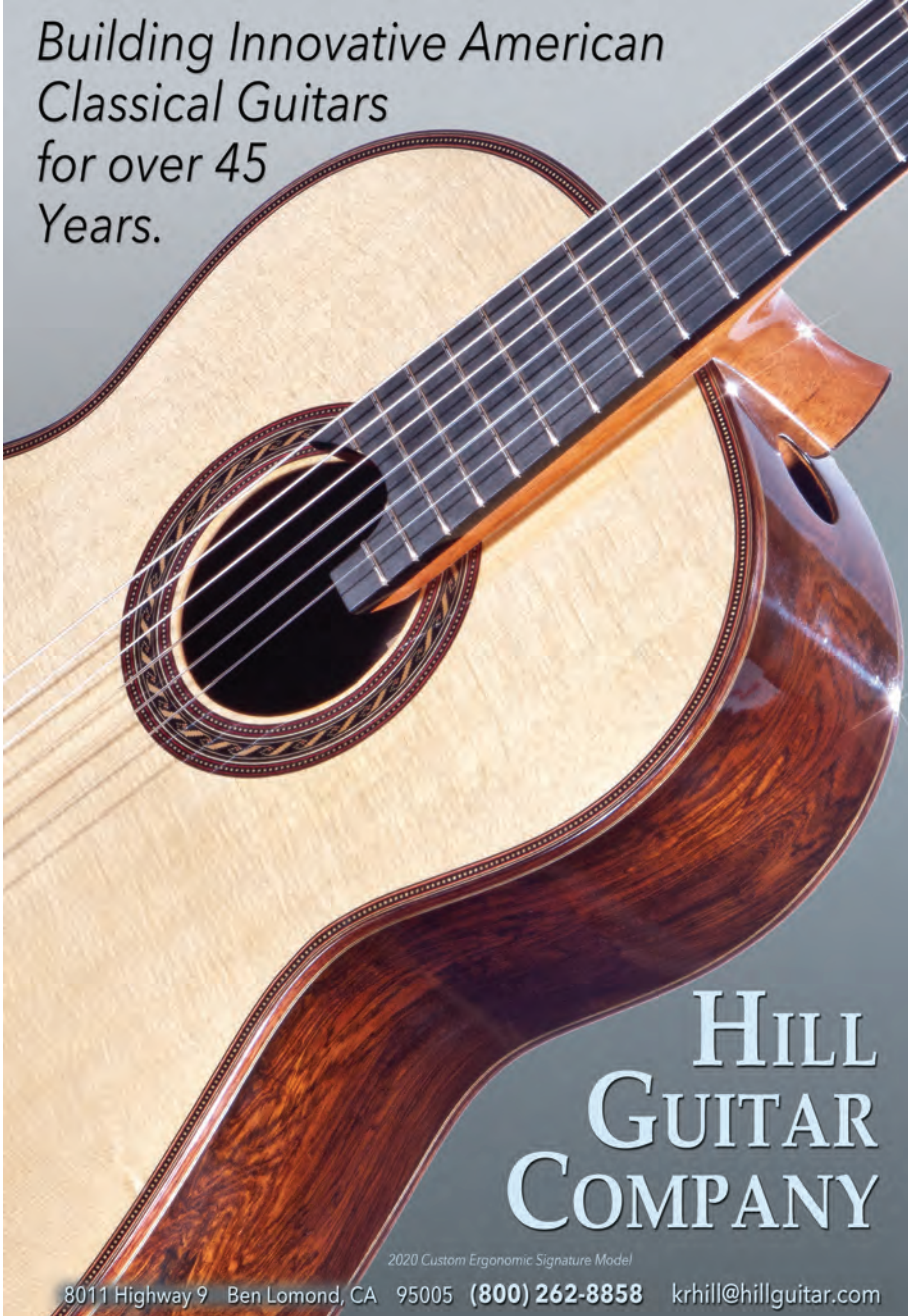
—Michael Katz, Berkeley, CA

THIS ISSUE'S QUESTION

What song do you never get tired of playing?

Respond to Editors.AG@Stringletter.com by June 30 and look for the results in the next issue.

We want to hear from you! Share at Editors.AG@Stringletter.com and facebook.com/AcousticGuitarMagazine



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GUITAR TALK



COURTESY OF ALBERTO LOMBARDI

How Sweet It Is

Alberto Lombardi on Motown, his Taylor guitars, and more

BY RICHARD BIENSTOCK

Alberto Lombardi had been working as a professional guitarist—a professional *electric* guitarist, that is—for more than two decades before he turned to the acoustic as a primary form of musical expression several years ago.

As for what led him to unplug? Tommy Emmanuel.

“What I find so appealing about his playing is that he acts as kind of a bridge between us electric guys and the acoustic fingerstyle approach, because he has a style that blends the two,” Lombardi explains. “Hearing him, I felt like I had a connection to the acoustic that I hadn’t felt before, and from there I went on to Chet Atkins and Jerry Reed and all those great acoustic players. But I needed Tommy as a bridge.”

In 2016, Lombardi released his first acoustic album, *Birds*, a collection of originals alongside arrangements of Italian (“Nel Blu Dipinto Di Blu,” aka “Volare”) and American and British (“Georgia on My Mind,” The Beatles’ “Come Together”) pop standards. Like Emmanuel, Lombardi’s playing on the record evidenced an approach rooted in Atkins-style picking and accented by inventive harmonic and melodic turns—and a healthy dose of rock ‘n’ roll flash.

“I come from the ‘80s and ‘90s, and we all had this craze about technique in those days and wanted to be fast like Steve Vai, Eddie Van Halen, and Yngwie Malmsteen,” he says. “Some of that heritage gets put into my fingerstyle playing.”

Another acoustic record, *The Fermi Paradox*, followed, though Lombardi recently returned to

the electric for a crowdfunded blues-rock-influenced effort, *Home*. At the same time, he is continuing to venture deeper into the acoustic world with a new instructional DVD for Stefan Grossman’s Guitar Workshop, which presents his ace fingerstyle arrangements of four Motown classics, including “How Sweet It Is (to Be Loved by You)” and “I Heard It Through the Grapevine.”

Though Lombardi has been playing Motown music in cover bands since his teenage days, the new instructional DVD came about somewhat unexpectedly. “Stefan heard me play ‘How Sweet It Is’ and said to me ‘Why don’t you do a lesson on Motown?’” Lombardi recalls. “I told him I only had the one arrangement, so he said, ‘Well, make up some more!’”



I caught up with Lombardi via phone from his home outside Rome to talk about his guitars, his playing style, and how he approaches his fingerstyle arrangements. At the time, Lombardi was under a countrywide quarantine due to the coronavirus outbreak and had just had a spate of local shows cancelled. But he was keeping things in perspective. “There’s no concerts, there’s no gatherings,” he told me. “But I am lucky. There are people here that have serious troubles, so we have to do this.”

What are your primary acoustics for fingerstyle work?

When I began to explore fingerstyle guitar about four or five years ago, I developed a relationship with Taylor. And so I built my little collection, which is three Taylors. My main one is a 515, which is a jumbo I bought used back in the '90s, when I was studying at Musicians Institute in Los Angeles. It has a very balanced tone with a crisp top end, and even though it’s a jumbo, it’s strangely not boomy. In the studio it’s such a great guitar, but I cannot carry it around—it’s 30 years old and I don’t want to break it. So I have a newer Taylor, a 412, and I also have a 612, which is an all-maple guitar, that I use much more. The 12s, they call them Grand Concert models. They’re smaller instruments, so fingerstyle playing works very well with them.

It’s interesting that your main recording guitar is the 515. Given its size, one wouldn’t think of using that model for fingerstyle playing.

It’s not supposed to be for fingerstyle, because jumbos usually have big bass and are sometimes even a little unbalanced on the bass side. But being a Taylor, it’s also crisp-sounding, so that balances out the bigness of the body. Those two things together work perfectly for fingerstyle playing. But live performance is a bit trickier, because the 515 is a very big guitar and I’m a small guy. So I prefer the Grand Concert models onstage.

I’ve also seen you play a B&G acoustic.

They just sent that to me. It’s the Caletta model, and I have to say it’s a very unique instrument. It has a very punchy, loud, defined tone. And there’s also a loud bass response, which is strange for a guitar that is very small, just a little bigger than a parlor. I plan on using it to film some guitar videos, because I really love it.

You played primarily electric guitar for roughly 25 years before transitioning to the acoustic. Was it difficult for you to adapt to the fingerstyle technique?

Absolutely. Although when I first approached

fingerstyle guitar, I tried Tommy Emmanuel’s version of “Classical Gas,” which was still pretty close to what I used to play. So I said, “Yeah, I can do this.” But then I tried the boom-chick stuff, like “Borsalino,” and some Chet Atkins things, and those were so hard and completely different from what I was used to playing. It’s probably easier to make that transition if you have classical training, which I don’t have. So I had to actually start from scratch, down to practicing the alternating bass and all that stuff. It was hard at the beginning.

One of your Guitar Workshop instructional videos, *Hot Licks: Exercises and Creative Tips for the Acoustic Guitarist*, focuses on how to adapt electric-style playing to the acoustic.

True. That focuses mostly on single-note lines, which takes some adapting as well. I throw lots of licks into my arrangements, and so for

‘I come from the ‘80s and ‘90s, and we all had this craze about technique in those days and wanted to be fast like Steve Vai, Eddie Van Halen, and Yngwie Malmsteen.’

me I had to learn how to adapt my legato technique onto the acoustic. Stefan noticed that I have a habit of inserting these licks into the arrangements, and he said, “Why don’t we do a video where you talk about all the stuff, and how you bring it from the electric guitar into your acoustic guitar playing?” And that’s how the DVD came about.

I’ve read that the first acoustic music Stefan Grossman heard from you was your arrangement of “Volare.” That song has become something of a calling card for you and features many of the techniques you are known for, such as Atkins-style alternating bass, rich and complex harmonic structures, and artificial harmonics.

Yes. I think one of the things that I really love about arranging for fingerstyle acoustic guitar is that I can do some of what I do usually in the studio when I’m arranging a pop or a rock record—working with strings

or horns, coming up with rhythm patterns for the drummer or bass lines for the bass player—and do it by myself on one guitar from the comfort of my sofa. And without a singer yelling at me because maybe he doesn’t like the piano part. [laughs]

“Volare” in particular; there is a version of that song that the Italian singer [Domenico] Modugno did on *The Ed Sullivan Show* with an orchestra, and there’s this beautiful Hammond organ on it. I tried to replicate that with the use of harmonics. And at the beginning, I do a small descending bass part to complement the harmony. Those are the types of things that I really like to put into arrangements, that make it more interesting and give it more color, I would say.

For your new record, *Home*, you returned to the electric. What were your main instruments in the studio?

Home is a blues-rock record sounding a lot like my influences—the Eagles, maybe some David Gilmour, and a lot of Sting. I’m a big fan of Sting. And people tend to tell me I sing a little bit like him. I’m not as good as he is, but the timber of the voice is maybe similar. For guitars, I had two Strats. One is a Custom Shop relic and the other one is an old Mexican Strat that I completely modified with Custom Shop parts. I also have a new B&G electric guitar—it’s called the Little Sister—that I’m really excited about and using a lot, but I didn’t have it in time for the record. So I basically just played Stratocasters.

You’re a Fender fan when it comes to electrics—you’ve even put together a live show that celebrates famous Stratocaster players.

Yes. It’s a show that I tour with where I perform the music of great Stratocaster-related players like Jimi Hendrix and Stevie Ray Vaughan and David Gilmour and Jeff Beck. That’s something that I’m trying to do more and more because I love playing that type of music, just as I love playing my own music on electric and acoustic guitar.

What do you love most about playing music on acoustic guitar?

I love that it is a complete, self-supporting instrument. And I think it has a very communicative tone. You can get a lot of expression out of it and paint the whole picture. Of course, the electric is also an expressive instrument, but when I play that I like to have other musicians with me, and that’s a different type of thing. But with the acoustic, you can do it all by yourself. I think that’s what I love most about it.

AC



Alex de Grassi with his
signature model Lowden



BUILDING THE BRIDGE

Alex de Grassi on the inner workings of his first solo album in 17 years

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

S ometime during the mid-2000s, Alex de Grassi, one of the great solo guitarists, reached a point where his usual mode of expression just wasn't working for him—at least not as a composer. “It was a watershed period for me,” de Grassi says. “I suddenly found it really difficult to write solo guitar music. Every time I'd start on something new, I'd be like, ‘No, no, no. This has to be for guitar and some kind of ensemble.’ My agent at the time kept asking when I'd do another solo record. I kept saying I would do one next year, but it wasn't happening.”

But de Grassi maintained a creative output during this period. Among other things, he wrote a comprehensive fingerstyle method for AG, available on the magazine's website, and was the artistic advisor to the String Letter Music School (now the Marin Community Music School) in San Anselmo, California. He began an ongoing duo with the classical guitarist and composer Andrew York, and worked with the Demania trio, which also included electric bassist Michael Manning and percussionist Chris Garcia, releasing the ensemble's solo album on his Tropo Records label. De Grassi also accompanied silent films like Charlie Chaplin's *Shoulder Arms* as part of a New York Guitar Festival series.

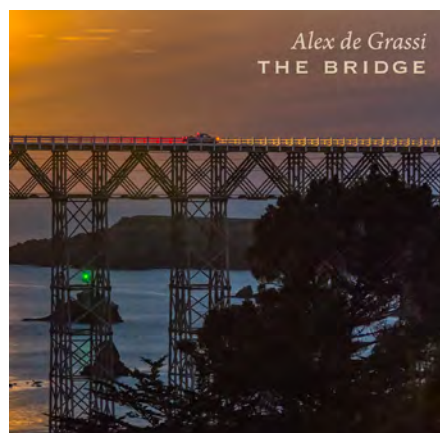
De Grassi, who is 68, became a household name among guitarists in the late 1970s, after his cousin William Ackerman invited him to record for his then-new Windham Hill record label. With his debut album, *Turning: Turning Back* (1978),

de Grassi established himself as a steel-string fingerstyle master, informed equally by the music of the British Isles and American folk and jazz traditions—a path he continued down in a string of albums for Windham Hill and other labels.

In 2016, in the middle of his “watershed period,” de Grassi found himself at Skywalker

record there and booked Skywalker without knowing fully what I was going to do.”

The results of the Skywalker sessions are heard on *The Bridge*, de Grassi's first solo album since 2003's *Now and Then: Folk Songs for the 21st Century*. On *The Bridge*, de Grassi plays originals, while also offering his interpretations of Jimi Hendrix (“Angel”), George and Ira Gershwin (“It Ain't Necessarily So”), and traditional folk numbers (“Shenandoah” and “Sí Bheag, Sí Mhór”). De Grassi's concepts and techniques on the album are both subtler and more complex than standard steel-string fare. In this lesson, edited and condensed from the accompanying video on AG's website, he breaks down some of the key moments.



The track “Mr. B Takes a Walk in the Rain” has a curious title and an exciting mixture of funk rhythms and jazz harmonies. Can you explain what's going on here?

It's a tribute to the late, great James Brown. I had this sort of funny image in my head of him replacing Gene Kelly in the movie *Singin' in the Rain*. So, imagine if you will, this is the soundtrack. James Brown is dancing and doing his thing, and it's kind of funky and slippery.

Let's break it down harmonically. I'm in DADGAD tuning, and in the verse, which is in F major, I'm barring the third fret to get an F11 chord [Example 1]. When it gets to the bridge, I go the relative minor, landing on a

Sound (a facility at film director George Lucas' workspace and ranch in Northern California), to record a live internet broadcast with the pop and jazz singer Jenna Mammina. After taking his Lowden signature model out of the case and playing just a few notes, he had a revelation. “I thought it sounded like one of the best concert halls I'd ever played,” he says. “I knew I had to

Tuning: D A D G A D

Example 1

| F11 | Dm(add9) | B \flat 7 | Gm11 | A7alt | B \flat $\frac{6}{9}$ | C7 $\frac{9}{9}$ |
|-----|----------|-------------|------|-------|-------------------------|------------------|
| | | | | | | |
| 3 | 7 | 8 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 1 |
| 3 | 8 | 7 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 3 |
| 3 | 9 | 6 | 3 | 5 | 0 | 3 |
| 5 | 0 | 8 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 3 |
| 6 | | | 5 | | 1 | |
| 3 | | | | | | |

Dm(add9) then to B♭7 and to Gm11 to A7alt, which is the V chord of D minor. It returns to the key of F, then eventually goes through some more changes to modulate a whole tone up to G7 before resuming the original key of F. Lots of dominant chords! Later in the piece there's another modulation [Example 2], and that gets us back to Dm(add9), the vi chord of the original key.

In a good solo guitar piece, there's a sense of different voices. In this case, I hear three: One is the melody or the singer; another sounds like a bass player; and then there's a three-part horn section. So, putting that all together, it sounds like this [Example 3]. I keep everything very staccato, to get a certain rhythmic feel and clarity, and I'm constantly moving the barring finger up and down. It's a little bit like a hinge technique, which took a lot of work on my part. I had to retrain my finger, and it was both psychologically and physically demanding, but eventually I got used to it, and now I can do it with a minimal amount of effort.

"Past Perfect" is another piece with harmonic complexity.

This is a piece I wrote right before we started the recording sessions, on my Goodall custom concert jumbo. It's like DADGAD, but with the bottom two strings tuned down a whole step. One of the things I love about this tuning is that I can get a lot a classic jazz-piano voicings, like this Cm9 [Example 4], which would be much harder to play in standard tuning. In the intro, I outline some harmonic ideas, using just a few notes [Example 5].

The first melodic phrase I play is in G Lydian [G A B C♯ D E F♯], but what's interesting is that I'm playing it over a C bass note. So, the C♯ should sound very dissonant with the C, but it goes by quickly and it just sounds maybe a little unusual but not wrong. When you're just playing a couple of notes you can get away with some unusual harmonic ideas, because there's a certain ambiguity and instability.

I don't even think of this passage as chords or harmony, just movement. And this

kind of brings up an idea to think about: A lot of folk music is modal, and then there's chromatic music, like certain types of jazz. I like to bring the two worlds together. I even came up with a term for it: *chromodal*, which sounds like some long-lost ancestor they dug up somewhere.

The lowest note in the appropriately titled "Eulogy in a Low Voice" is an A below the low E in standard tuning. How are you getting there?

I wrote this piece a number of years ago, on the occasion of hearing of the luthier Lance McCollum's very unexpected and untimely death. I owned this baritone guitar he made, but hadn't played it a lot—I was kind of trying to figure out what to do with it. I took the guitar out of its case, and the piece wrote itself in about 15 minutes, which is rare for me.

One of the things I love about the baritone guitar is that it's got such a soulful sound, which I think works well for these slow ballad pieces. I tune my baritone down a perfect fifth,

Example 2

Dm(add9)

Example 3

F11

staccato throughout



Tuning: C G D G A D

Example 4

Example 5

Cm9 N.C.

Em9 Bb Ebadd9

Em9 Cm(add9) Bb/Ab

N.C. Cm13

but the song actually sounds quite good when played on a standard guitar [as notated in **Example 6**]. The melody really leads in the beginning and the harmony just sort of follows. And as in “Past Perfect,” there’s that mixture of modal and chromatic playing.

How do you produce those extra resonances on your arrangements of Jimi Hendrix’s “Angel” and the traditional folk song “Shenandoah”?

I’m using a Sympitar [an instrument combining aspects of a guitar and sitar] that luthier Fred Carlson made. It’s got 12 sympathetic strings inside, and I double up on some of the key tones. For “Shenandoah,” I’m playing in D major, so a couple of the sympathetic strings are tuned to D.

I’ve learned that if I play too many notes or a complicated chord on the Sympitar, it confuses the sympathetic strings. So, it works particularly well for things where you can have single-note lines and lots of pauses in the music. I wanted it to sound really big, like the open country, the wide, unexplored unknown [Example 7]. At the same time, I wanted to give it a little bit of an Eastern sound [Example 8]. But I’m also using some ideas from jazz harmony, like an F# triad over a D bass note [Example 9]. When you build a scale off that F#, you get an altered-dominant sound [Example 10].



COURTESY OF ALEX DE GRASSI

WHAT HE PLAYS

The main guitar Alex de Grassi used in recording *The Bridge* was his Lowden signature model, with its Sitka spruce top, quilted maple back and sides, and deep cutaway. He also played a Carlson Sympitar (on “Angel” and “Shendandoah”), Goodall custom concert jumbo (“Past Perfect,” “But What?,” and “Sí Bhaeg, Sí Mhór”), and McCollum baritone (“Eulogy in a Low Voice”). He uses Elixir Nanoweb phosphor bronze strings on all of his guitars—generally light gauge, with a .056 sixth string, for extra oomph on the bass, and a standard baritone set on the McCollum.

Standard Tuning

Example 6

Example 6 shows a musical score for a guitar piece. The score is written in standard notation (treble and bass clefs) and includes a guitar-specific notation (fingering) below the staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 3/4. The score is divided into four measures, each with a chord label above it: Em7b5, C#m11, Eb/Db, and C#7sus4. The guitar-specific notation shows fingerings for the left hand (10-9-10-9-7-6, 7-8, 5-3-2, 0, 4-5-2, 3-4-3, 4) and the right hand (7, 4, 4, 4, 4, 6-4-7-4, 4).

*De Grassi plays this example on a baritone guitar, which sounds a perfect fifth lower than written.

Example 7 shows a musical score for a guitar piece. The score is written in standard notation (treble and bass clefs) and includes a guitar-specific notation (fingering) below the staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 3/4. The score is divided into four measures, each with a chord label above it: D#m/E, F13, F#sus2/D, and F#sus2/D. The guitar-specific notation shows fingerings for the left hand (6, 6-7-9-10, 10, 8, 10-10-11-8, 10, 11-8, 11-0, 0) and the right hand (6-7, 7, 8, 10, 10).



F[♯]/C **B[♭]dim/A** **C[♯]sus4** **C[♯]** **F/E[♭]** **E/F**

Fingerings: 2-2-3, 5-6-8-7, 4-6, 6-5, 7-9, 3-0-8, 4-6, 6-5, 8

D[♭]maj7[♯]11 **Bdim7** **E7alt**

Fingerings: 8-8-8-10, 10-9-8-11-12, 12, 11-10-12, 12-11-10-12, 13-11-10-12, 12-10-9-8, etc.

Tuning: D A D G B E

Example 7

D

Fingerings: 7-7-7, 5-7-8, 5-7-5, 5-10-10-9, 7-5-5-7, 0-6-7, 0, 2-7-7-7, 5-7-8

Example 8

D

Fingerings: 5-7-5, 5-4-5-4-5, 6, 0-3-6, 3-5-6, 4-5-4-5-4, 6-6-5, 7-7-5-6-4-5, 0

Example 9

F[♯]/D

Fingerings: 2-3, 4-3-2-2, 4-5-2-3-5, 3-5-2, 3-2-5-3, 5-3-2-5, 4

Example 10

Fingerings: 2-3, 4-3-2-2, 4-5-2-3-5, 3-5-2, 3-2-5-3, 5-3-2-5, 4

Was the title track inspired by a particular bridge? And how do you achieve the separation between the nonstop ostinato and the melody?

I wrote “The Bridge” while staying out on the coast and looking at the Albion River Bridge in Northern California. It’s a very dramatic bridge, an old wooden trestle structure that’s almost 200 feet above the river and the ocean. At nighttime, I would watch as the cars came across and wonder who all these people were—and also study the patterns that the headlights made through the railings.

There’s the melody and there’s the ostinato [Example 11]. One of the really challenging things about the ostinato [shown in the down-stemmed notes] is keeping the time throughout while playing the pattern at a lower volume than the melody. And the notes have to be very

short and controlled; you can’t let them ring, especially the open sixth string, because it will get muddy very quickly.

The melody [up-stemmed notes] consists of these long notes that you want to play loud and sustaining. I try to give each melodic note its own tone color, which means picking at different spots between the saddle and the soundhole. The point is, I’m trying to create some contrast, so there are a lot of things to think about and control in this piece.

In a more traditional mode, you play “Sí Bheag, Sí Mhór,” the old Irish tune.

It’s one of Turlough O’Carolan’s more popular melodies and one that lots of guitar players have done arrangements of. Mine is in DADGAD. I’ve tried to keep it pretty simple, just adding some fills to the original melody. I play each A section

[Example 12] just a little bit differently, to keep it from sounding too repetitive.

I let the strings ring openly in this piece, though occasionally I’ll do a rest stroke if I want to damp a bass note to keep it from ringing through into the next measure. I’m trying to really milk the melody because it’s such a great one. A couple of notes on some subtle details: One is I sometimes hold on to a higher melody note as it rings into the next note [as in bars 8–10], for harmonic effect. Another is that occasionally I use a delayed hammer-on [bars 11–12]. Here I play an E and let it ring into a low D before hammering the E on to F#. It’s a nice effect.

Then, there’s a phrase of mine, a classic cross-string pattern in which I let all of the notes ring [Example 13]. It kind of speeds up and then slows down when it gets down to the bottom—just like a ride on a roller coaster. **AG**

Tuning: D A D G A D

Example 11

Dm *play three times*

Bbmaj7

A Dm A Dm

etc.



Example 12

Example 12 is a musical score for guitar and bass. It consists of three systems of music. The first system has a guitar staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a bass staff with a bass clef. The guitar staff has a 3/4 time signature. The first system includes chords D, G, D, and G. The second system includes chords A7, D, A, D, Gmaj7, and F#m7. The third system includes chords Bm, A, D, Gmaj7, F#m7, Bm, A, and D. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and fingerings (e.g., 0, 2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10).

Example 13

Example 13 is a musical score for guitar and bass. It consists of two systems of music. The first system has a guitar staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a bass staff with a bass clef. The guitar staff has a 3/4 time signature. The first system includes the chord D. The second system includes chords Bm(b6), Em9, G, and A. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and fingerings (e.g., 0, 2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10).



Dan Henkel

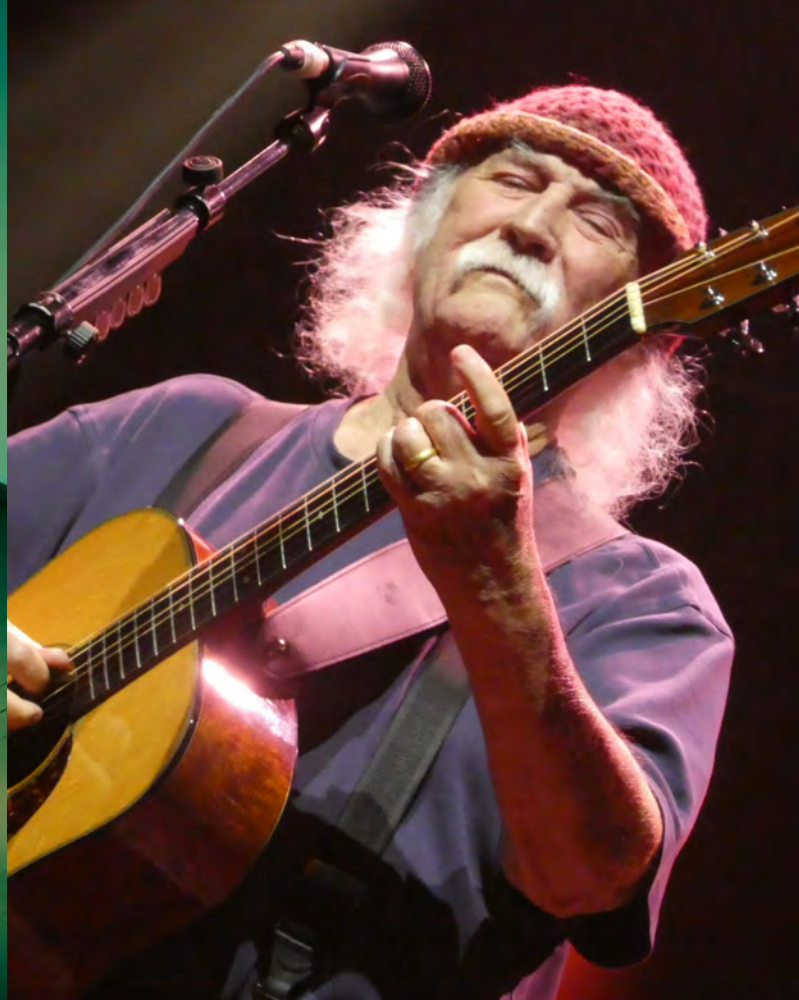


Bob Minner

Playing Through



Judith Kay



David Crosby

A guitarist's guide to managing aging and overuse injuries

BY DAVID MCCARTY

Playing guitar is a pain. At first, we suffer through blistered fingertips, over-stretched tendons, fatigued muscles, and limited range of movement. With practice, those hindrances pass and we play easily.

Until we can't.

Acoustic guitarists, like everyone, must manage physiological changes due to aging, often including hearing loss, arthritis, and repetitive use injuries, that can make it difficult to continue playing guitar well. What would you endure if a disabling illness or injury kept you from playing guitar? Would you opt for invasive orthopedic surgery and a potentially long and painful recovery? Or, say you're a top-line Nashville touring pro. Could you hide a significant noise-induced hearing loss for years in fear of the silent stigma on hearing loss rampant in Music City's cutthroat studio scene?

I spoke with five guitarists who've faced such setbacks and pushed through to resume their playing careers. Their experiences may provide practical advice for those dealing with repetitive stress injuries and aging issues. And they could give you just the tools you need to avoid incapacitating medical conditions that might affect your playing years from now.



HEARING ISSUES

Of the issues mentioned above, hearing loss is perhaps the cruelest for acoustic musicians. There's no cure. The noise of modern living itself can damage hearing, and exposure to high-decibel sounds, like loud concerts, poses special risks for musicians. Modern hearing aids, by their very design, reproduce musical sound terribly, so your beautiful guitar might sound like a toy. And when you're a professional musician, the stigma of admitting you deal with noise-induced hearing loss (NIHL) can be a deterrent to even seeking help. Needless to say, all this takes a psychological toll, as well.

Just ask Bob Minner. "If you're a musician for any length of time, playing gigs for ten or so years, you've got hearing loss," Minner says

flatly. "The type of hearing loss and amount is a variable. It's a case-by-case thing."

Minner, well-known in flatpicking circles, holds the lead acoustic and rhythm guitar chair in the Tim McGraw Band. Over years of touring and playing everything from clubs and festivals to large arenas, recording in Nashville's super competitive studio scene, and field jamming, Minner's learned a lot about how acoustic guitarists can—and can't—cope with hearing loss.

It starts by recognizing and admitting your hearing is affected. "At first, you ignore it. You turn your amp, TV, stereo, up more. But eventually you reach a threshold where you notice things sound different," Minner explains.

He also had to overcome an unfair if understandable prejudice. "When musicians talk about hearing loss, there's a stigma that can make other musicians look at you and not want to hire you or work with you," Minner confides. "But those musicians probably have hearing loss, too. Being silent about it is a way to protect themselves. We take pride in being pro musicians, so we often deny the reality of that."

Indeed, one highly prominent Americana musician with 90-percent hearing loss from a blast of feedback in his monitors declined to be interviewed for this article because of the stigma associated with musicians with NIHL. For Minner, overcoming that obstacle was only his first step. When he did seek help, just locating an audiologist with experience treating guitarists proved difficult, even in Music City.

Minner's audio testing in an anechoic chamber answered a lot of questions. He already knew he had some hearing loss in his left ear. The testing not only found NIHL in both ears, it provided a revealing audiogram showing a significant difference in the frequency response between his left and right ears. That gave Minner's hearing team the data they needed.

Using those charts, Minner was fitted for hearing aids programmed to boost or dampen frequencies differently between the two ears, like a parametric EQ for each side. The aids helped him hear his wife, Ginger, better in noisy restaurants, which is all they're really engineered to do. It helped his life, but he still noticed a big difference in his perception of musical sound when using hearing aids.

"When I listen to a great acoustic guitar, my response to the guitar isn't the same as someone with better hearing," he says candidly. "I can still tell what's good and what's bad, though. But you have to realize that regardless of cost, nothing will replace how you hear your instrument."

Brian C.J. Moore, Ph.D., emeritus professor at University of Cambridge in the UK, is a

world-leading researcher studying how NIHL affects the human perception of musical sound. He's also an expert in the shortfalls of electronic hearing aids when used by musicians. And he empathizes with Minner's fate. "I played guitar, first in rock bands and now jazz. That triggered my interest in music and sound perception," Moore says. It also helped cause his own case of NIHL.

Moore's research aims to quantify the mechanisms by which high-pressure noise damages the hearing organs, and how that damage affects our perception of musical sounds. Loud noise hitting the outer hair cells of the cochlea, for example, triggers a damaging metabolic effect leading to irreversible damage, he explains.

"The inner ear is highly metabolically active. So if the hair cells are stimulated too much, it causes metabolic damage to the muscles, as can happen to the muscles of a marathon runner. The noise is poisoning the outer hair cells," Moore notes. Intense transient sounds, such as a loud feedback accident, also can cause mechanical damage to the cochlea.

To his fellow guitarists seeking hearing enhancement, Moore offers this advice: Check the frequency response of any hearing device you intend to use. Most only go from 200–5,000Hz, which is adequate for speech recognition, but terrible for music because it cuts out the highs and lows that make music so enjoyable.

"So tell the audiologist you need aids with as wide a frequency range as possible, and then set up a special music program to make the best use of that range," he counsels. An upper range of at least 10,000Hz is best.

Feedback reduction software in hearing aids can play havoc with musical sound perception, he adds, so ensure that feedback reduction is minimized or deactivated in the music mode. And try to use open or semi-open earpieces that allow a mix of the signal from the aid and the natural sound source to reach the eardrum to allow bass sounds to be heard naturally.

But even with specific programming, current systems designed to boost human speech lack the technology to adequately reproduce musical sound. Working in conjunction with Moore, Earlens (for whom Moore is a paid consultant) has developed a hearing aid technology that addresses many drawbacks musicians experience with conventional aids.

Unlike conventional hearing aids that act like a tiny audio system that receives external sound and sends highly processed sound waves to the eardrum, the Earlens system uses a tiny transducer placed in contact with the eardrum itself to physically vibrate it, explains Drew Dundas, Ph.D., the company's head of

audiology and product development. The physics of speaker technology in the sizes that can be placed in the ear canal, he explains, limit the available audible bandwidth with conventional hearing aids. Earlens addresses those limitations.

“The unique method of action—directly driving the tiny bones of the middle ear via a custom (audio) lens placed in contact with the eardrum—allows for much more efficient energy transfer into the ear,” Dundas says. An ear, nose, and throat specialist performs the non-surgical placement in a quick initial appointment, followed by sessions with an audiologist to calibrate and adjust the listening experience for the user.”

Moore adds, “My Earlens aids cover a very wide frequency range from 100–10,000Hz with the ear canal fully open. I can get much more amplification without acoustic feedback, so there’s no need for a feedback canceler. I find I can hear a lot more music that way.”



REPETITIVE STRESS INJURIES

If fingerstyle guitarist Judith Kay won’t shake your hand when you meet her, don’t take it personally.

“To this day, I do not extend my right arm or hand. A hard handshake can reinjure me and set me back for three to six months,” the Delaware-based professional guitarist and teacher explains. “There are many things I can’t do or that I have to rule out: no tennis, no playing drums. Anything like trying to catch a ball is out of the question. I do nothing that sends strong vibrations up my arm.”

Kay suffers from thoracic outlet syndrome (TOS). According to John Hopkins Medicine, the thoracic outlet is the ring formed by the top ribs, just below the collarbone. TOS occurs when nerves or blood vessels are compressed by the rib, collarbone, or neck muscles at the top of the outlet. It manifests in three varieties, including neurogenic TOS, which crippled Kay’s professional career for years. Symptoms include

pain or weakness in the shoulder and arm, tingling or discomfort in the fingers, or one or both arms that tire quickly. In the worst cases, TOS causes atrophy—shrinking and weakness—of the pad of the thumb and the muscle of the palm that leads to the thumb.

But TOS often is misdiagnosed. In an acute stage for five years, Kay went from doctor to doctor without relief. She had to quit playing entirely and spent years with reflexive sympathetic dystrophy (RSD), searing electric nerve pain, running along first her left and then right arms.

“I thought I would never play again. But then, miraculously, I did find the right doctor and was able to start again,” Kay explains.

After exploring other treatments such as acupuncture and Rolfing, it wasn’t until she began therapy with Emil Pascarelli, MD, a New York-based physician who literally wrote the book on avoiding and treating repetitive stress injuries, that Kay found relief.

“He was a guru for people with RSIs, especially musicians,” she says of the late doctor.

Focusing her passion on a new challenge, Kay worked with Dr. Pascarelli and a referral physician to adapt his principles to how guitarists should warm-up, practice, exercise, and perform.

“What I learned is muscles work in tandem. As a guitarist, we put our arms around the instrument, lengthening the trapezius [the large muscle used to tilt and turn the head and neck, shrug, steady the shoulders, and twist the arms] and shortening the pectoralis [the large muscle in the upper chest fanning across the chest from the shoulder to the breastbone]. When they get out of balance, bad things happen,” Kay says.

To combat her TOS, Kay and her physicians developed a personalized, 90-minute routine of stretching and exercises aimed at restoring muscular balance. She also underwent tri-weekly deep-tissue massage treatments she says were crucial for her recovery. Kay’s website (judithkay.com) includes RSI links and her recommendations for other guitarists.

“Musicians need to work out and treat themselves like they’re sit-down athletes,” she says. “We need to be in shape like a marathon runner or a weight lifter. So I started to get my muscles all back in balance.” Kay also now advocates for better awareness of the risk RSIs pose to musicians of all ages.

“I’m trying to get a change in this issue,” she notes. “College programs and music schools are woefully remiss for not having RSI prevention programs in schools. Music colleges and conservatories all need to have an awareness and education program about issues like mine.”



WHEN ARTHRITIS STRIKES

Fingerstyle guitarist Dan Henkel knows what it’s like to have an orthopedic surgeon cut out a wrist bone, drill a hole through a bone in his thumb, sever a tendon, then pull that tendon through the hole and attach it to a different spot in his painful, arthritic left thumb. It’s not as fun as it sounds, he darkly assures.

Henkel, who has studied and played classical and fingerstyle guitar semi-professionally since college, was diagnosed with severe osteoarthritis in both thumbs. The pain made playing guitar almost impossible. He underwent ligament reconstruction and tendon interposition (LRTI) surgery, the most common remedy for his condition, in hopes of playing again.

An expert on the procedure, David S. Ruch, MD, chief of hand surgery at Duke Health in Durham, North Carolina, wrote in an article on LRTI for the Arthritis Foundation that many patients respond well to conservative medical measures such as anti-inflammatories, splints, activity modification, and limited steroid injections.

Henkel had a different experience. “I have osteoarthritis in both thumbs, so basically there’s no cartilage left. It’s bone on bone, which was quite painful,” the retired Indianapolis PR executive reflects. “Five years ago, my left hand hurt so much from playing too much music that I couldn’t play at all for 18 months.”

The LRTI procedure Henkel chose removes the arthritic joint surfaces and replaces them with a cushion of tissue that keeps the bones separated. The surgeon removes all or part of the trapezium bone in the wrist. A nearby tendon is detached at one end, then passed through a hole drilled in the thumb metacarpal. The tendon is rolled like an anchovy and placed into the space where the bone was removed, with a success rate of over 90 percent.

“Most patients achieve complete pain relief and mobility equal to that of a healthy

thumb, with results lasting at least 15 to 20 years,” Dr. Ruch wrote.

But like all surgeries, LRTI has drawbacks. Patients endure a lengthy, painful recovery. They may also may lose pinch strength, making it difficult to grasp and hold objects, a definite problem for guitarists. LRTI also noticeably shortens the thumb, which can limit reach and mobility when playing guitar. None of that intimidated Henkel.

“It took eight weeks before I had [thumb] function back,” he reports. “I took a travel guitar and strung it with silk-and-steel strings so I could do some playing,” Six months later, Henkel felt reborn as a musician and now loves taking his Taylor out of its case again.

“It’s like a gift,” he says. “One good outcome of this is I rediscovered the fundamental joy of playing guitar again. The physical manipulation of the instrument. The vibration hitting your chest. The beauty of the tone. I’ve been relearning pieces I first learned 30 years ago, but hopefully I’m playing them more musically now,” he says, adding, “It’s like being reunited with someone you love.”



ALTERNATIVE RELIEF

David Crosby knows loss and reunion. The two-time Rock and Roll Hall of Fame member and avid blue-water sailor has two bad shoulders that have endured broken bones and four dislocations. He’s also developed RSI hand injuries over his long career as a guitarist.

“I’ve recently developed two things that affect my guitar playing. I have tendonitis causing ‘trigger finger’ in the middle two fingers

of both hands, and I’m developing arthritis,” the 78-year-old legend says. “It’s not enough to stop me playing, but I do have those things going on that I treat with CBD.”

The longtime cannabis advocate recently founded his own company to grow and produce CBD oil and cannabis products. Croz uses CBD extensively to mitigate the pain and soreness of his RSIs and orthopedic injuries.

“I use CBD two ways,” he explains. “I vaporize flower that’s high in CBD to get it that way. The other way is I rub a topical cream into both shoulders, sometimes my neck, and on my hands when they’re hurting.”

HOME REMEDIES

Have you experienced (and hopefully overcome) any age- or playing-induced medical issues, including those not covered here? Have any advice to share with your fellow players? If so, send an email to Editors.AG@stringletter.com and we’ll pass it along.



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The biggest appeal of CBD, Crosby adds, is the lack of significant side effects or addiction, unlike opioids and NSAIDs [nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs]. “With opioids, you know the problem; use them for three weeks and you can get hooked. And NSAIDs are terrible for the liver,” he emphasizes. “CBD doesn’t have a negative side effect. It ameliorates the pain and acts as an anti-inflammatory. My sincere belief is that once we teach people how to use CBD, it’s going to be huge.”

HEALTHY HABITS

So what’s the takeaway for players young and old who want to have a long, healthy relationship with the acoustic guitar?

Coping with hearing loss is a huge challenge. Prevention is uppermost. Bob Minner and Brian Moore advocate using custom molded earplugs that attenuate all frequencies when attending any loud event or concert. Avoid loud music through earphones. Pay attention to any pain or discomfort in the ears that could signal damage to the auditory organs and immediately reduce exposure. Take hearing breaks regularly during the day, and especially before a gig, like Minner does, to minimize fatigue and ear strain. And work with an audiologist if you need hearing aids to maximize their ability to reproduce musical sound as naturally as possible. I’ve taken my gorgeous Will Kimble mandolin into my audiologist’s office so she can adjust frequencies in my aids as I play, with only partial satisfaction.

Unlike Judith Kay’s TOS, Dan Henkel’s genetic arthritis didn’t have a prevention option. The lesson they stress is paying attention to all pain when you play. When it hurts, something’s not right. Seek medical attention, and work on a personal program of stretching and strengthening now to ward off or delay RSIs. Get a solid critique of your playing posture, and work slowly to improve it and become more efficient.

And never give up seeking help until you find it.

David McCarty plays guitar and mandolin and has opened for David Grisman and Ricky Skaggs. He has been coping with hearing loss, traumatic orthopedic injury, and essential tremor as a performer for years. Follow McCarty on Twitter @mcgroup53.



BEYOND BARRES

Easy alternatives to difficult chord shapes

The dreaded F chord, which requires a first-finger barre across all six strings, is the most challenging grip for most beginning guitarists to play cleanly and consistently. This shape can also become problematic for older guitarists who have been able to form it without difficulty for many years.

The good news is that there are some fine alternatives that are less demanding on the fretting hand—and no less musical. **Example 1** shows three alternatives to the F barre chord. The first shape involves wrapping the thumb around the neck to grab the sixth-string F. If that’s uncomfortable, you can do the F chord with the fifth (C) in the bass, as shown in the next frame, or just play the triad’s three notes (F, A, C) on strings 4–2. **Example 2** extends these concepts to F minor chords.

Similarly, instead of playing an F7 barre chord, try the three-note shape depicted in **Example 3**, which could be alternatively fingered with the first, second, and third fingers on strings 6, 4, and 3, respectively. This voicing eliminates the chord’s fifth, C, which can be thought of as an inessential tone. In fact, do away with the root (F) for an F7 that’s even easier to form; the second shape contains only the flattened seventh (E \flat) and the third (A). And here’s something cool: In the key of F, you can move the F7 shape down one fret for the IV chord (B \flat 7) or up one shape (C7) for the V; three chords for the price of one easy shape. —Adam Perlmutter

Example 1

Example 2

Example 3

Example 4

| | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------------------------|---------------|
| F | F | F | Fm | Fm | Fm | F7 | F7 | B\flat7 | C7 |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | |

Ageless Ardor

Guitarist/composer/teacher Benjamin Verdery
has taken the eclectic road

BY MARK SMALL

Benjamin Verdery inhabits his own exclusive territory in the classical guitar world. Among the virtuosi of the Baby Boomer generation, it's not hard to make a case that Verdery has explored the most diverse musical terrain. The repertoire on the 15 albums in his catalog ranges from works by masters such as Bach, Strauss, Mozart, and others, to the most adventurous composers of contemporary classical landscape. He has also made five albums featuring his own works and his arrangements of songs by Prince, Jimi Hendrix, traditional folk tunes and hymns, musical settings for Buddhist texts, and more. His concerts and recordings reveal his polyamorous relationships with all manner of guitars. Classical, steel-, 12-string and baritone acoustics, and electric guitars are fellow travelers on his expeditions.

Verdery has played in venues ranging from New York's Carnegie Hall to theaters and

festivals throughout the U.S., Canada, Europe, the Caribbean, South America, and Asia. In addition to his prodigious work as a solo recitalist, a partial list of his collaborators includes guitar titan John Williams and classical flutist Rie Schmidt (Verdery's wife), 12-string expert Leo Kottke, former Police guitarist Andy Summers, Celtic guitarist William Coulter, new age composer/key-boardist Craig Peyton, mixed vocal artist Mark Martin, and hip-hop singer Billy Dean Thomas. Classical guitarists such as Williams, David Russell, the Assad Brothers, and the Los Angeles Guitar Quartet have performed and recorded his compositions.

For the past three and a half decades, Verdery has chaired the guitar department at Yale University and nurtured many stellar performers and educators, including Jiji Kim (Arizona State University), Rene Izquierdo

(Wisconsin State University), Kim Perlak (Berklee College of Music), Michael Nicoletta (Cornish College of the Arts), Matthew Rohde (Kithara Project), Scott Borg (Montgomery College), and more.

The week before the COVID-19-mandated social distancing, the ever upbeat and gregarious Verdery couldn't mask his enthusiasm for *Scenes from Ellis Island*, his latest album of original music, during a wide-ranging conversation in his teaching studio at Yale's Leigh Hall.

RAIN, ELLIS ISLAND, AND ARISTOTLE

Scenes from Ellis Island showcases Verdery's skills as a solo and collaborative composer and multifaceted performer. The opener, "What He Said," is a two-guitar shootout with Verdery's former student Simon Powis, charged with dueling bass melodies and rapid-fire antiphonal chord volleys. It's a virtuosic tribute to the excitement



ANDRE R. GAGNE

and soul of gospel music, with nods to Aretha Franklin, Ray Charles, and even Lyle Lovett.

Verdery's liner notes characterize the four-movement "From Aristotle" as "one of the more unique and exhilarating collaborations of my career." Vocal wunderkind Mark Martin co-composed the suite with Verdery, with texts drawn from Aristotle's book on linguistics. The result is a panorama of lyrical melodies, percussive beatbox grooves, and multi-pitched Tuvan throat singing complementing Verdery's thoughtful chording, imitative melodic lines, and percussion effects on the guitar's strings and body. "I can't write what Mark does; he can make *any* sound with his voice," Verdery says. "He would decide where to sing and where to do vocal effects. He changed a lot of things and gave me some great ideas. Mark has been a really great teacher—even though he's 30 years younger than me." Their video of the work

created for Verdery's YouTube channel is a full-spectrum arts experience replete with a dancer.

Throughout his career, Verdery has worked with alternate tunings and he utilizes them on the new album's solo selections. "Three pieces on this record are in scordatura," he says. "Joni Mitchell [celebrated for her use of nonstandard tunings] is a person who—from a distance—influenced me. I was playing Bach and concert repertoire, but I was always amazed by her voicings."

Among the pieces in scordatura are the two movements of "Now and Ever," a work penned for David Russell. "The tuning D G D A A# E [lowest note to highest] inspired the melodies and harmonies. The first movement is introspective, with ringing *campanella* passages mixing fretted notes with harmonics on the upper strings and rumbling bass lines. The eight-minute second movement alternates between brash low-end chords, mercurial

arpeggios, tremolos, and probing melodic jabs in all registers. The work represents Verdery's musical statement "against slavery of any kind."

In another solo piece, "The Rain Falls Equally on All Things," Verdery used the tuning D A D G A E. "I needed the interval of a second in there," he says, referring to the distance between strings 3 and 2. "There are passages where I wanted the sound of water dripping and used a lot of *glissandi*. That tuning really worked."

The title track and album closer is a 13-minute, single-movement work premiered in 1992 by Staten Island's Curtis High School Guitar Ensemble and later recorded by the LAGQ on their *Air & Ground* album (2000). Verdery's atmospheric 2020 take features overdubbed classical, baritone, and steel-string guitars, plus Guilherme Monegatto's silvery cello lines and Malian singer Hawa Kassé Mady Diabaté's vocal improvisations in

her native tongue. With deep-in-the-mix multilingual singing and conversations, coins scraping strings, and bottleneck-slide seagull impressions, Verdery ponders the sounds and sights possibly experienced aboard immigrant ships that arrived in New York Harbor in past centuries. As for his choice to program it on this album, Verdery replies, “It’s not unlike a sculptor or painter who will do a show of his or her new work, but often exhibit older pieces too. Musicians generally want to have a manifestation of that.”

ECUMENICAL ROOTS

The music coursing around Verdery’s vivid imagination springs from his childhood in Danbury, Connecticut, hearing the records his older brother played around the house and sacred strains absorbed in the Episcopal church where his father was the pastor.

“My father’s church had an influence on my Bach playing,” he says. “I’d hear the Anglican hymns and a great organist playing Bach. I loved singing in church. At the same time, my brother was feeding me music by the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, Jethro Tull, Pentangle, Bert Jansch, and others. When you are young and get bitten by the music bug, you know there is no turning back. I didn’t care about anything but guitar.”

He started taking guitar lessons at a local music store. “My teacher, Russ Mumma, was a jazzier and there were some pretty incredible musicians coming through there,” Verdery recalls. “Russ wanted me to learn jazz standards and I started learning to read music with him.”

The summer before his senior year of high school, Verdery heard a classical guitarist for the first time. “By then, I was playing the prelude from Bach’s first cello suite with a pick, and I played it for him,” he remembers. “He encouraged me, and after that I went out and bought a cheap classical guitar.”

Verdery pursued classical technique studies with Phillip de Fremery and interpretation with Frederic Hand. Subsequently, a guitar festival in France where he heard Leo Brouwer, John Williams, Abel Carlevaro, and Alirio Díaz made a lasting impression. Verdery ultimately earned his degree in classical guitar from the State University of New York Purchase. He had long been taken with Leo Kottke’s original guitar instrumentals, and soon took his composing further with Brouwer, Hand, and others as models.

An encounter with flamenco guitarist Paco Penã in Spain in the 1980s resulted in Verdery’s introduction to John Williams. The two became fast friends and have since performed and recorded together. “In music, you just don’t know what can happen,” he says.



MITSUKO VERDERY

During those years, Verdery was among the rising guitar stars that routinely congregated at the shop of groundbreaking luthier Thomas Humphrey on Manhattan’s 72nd Street to share their discoveries. The coterie included Eliot Fisk, Sharon Isbin, Sérgio and Odair Assad, David Starobin, Lily Afshar, David Tannenbaum, and more, who became leaders of their generation. Verdery’s influence on the classical guitar world is documented in the 2018 book *Benjamin Verdery: A Montage of a Classical Guitarist*, edited by Thomas Donahue. It includes chapters by compatriots Sérgio Assad, Bryce Dessner, Eliot Fisk, Frederic Hand, David Leisner, Martha Masters, Andy Summers, and David Russell.

Verdery remains at the vortex in New York as the artistic director of the guitar series at the 92nd Street Y. For the past nine years, he has curated a robust concert series and tributes to Brouwer, Julian Bream, and Andrés Segovia at the venerable Upper East Side cultural and community center.

TIMELESS ENTHUSIASM

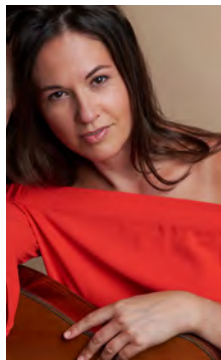
He is also a staunch supporter of new music, and began commissioning American composers

for Yale School of Music guitar audition pieces. The *Ben Verdery Guitar Project: On Vineyard Sound* album compiles the diverse entries—some are solo electric guitar works and others omit tempo and expression markings—to reveal the imagination of the player. Verdery’s other activities include an upcoming recording of a work for classical guitar in Nashville tuning, and a string quartet composed by his former student and ascendant composer Bryce Dessner, who is also a member of the popular New York band the National.

Verdery fosters in his students the excitement he has maintained since he was their age. “Their curiosity is up, and they are enthusiastic about the wide range of music they’re playing. They do everything from metal to chamber music and are learning a lot from each other.

“As a teacher, you are setting an example, and I think my students are happy about the different things I do,” he continues. “With my students, the difference in age falls out the window. I have more experience than them, but we talk together as if we are the same age because we’re all so passionate about music. It is endlessly interesting.”

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CLASSICAL GUITAR



Peace, Love & Guitars

Michael Gurian, Linda Manzer, Richard Hoover, and Steve Klein remember the 1970s lutherie revolution

BY DICK BOAK WITH ADAM PERLMUTTER

In the mid-1960s, many members of the Baby Boomer generation, myself included, began wearing bell-bottom pants, growing our hair long, and fighting the rising tide of conformity to avoid being pigeonholed into jobs that wouldn't bring us satisfaction and fulfillment. Perhaps one of the most popular tomes for our do-it-yourself cohort was *The Whole Earth Catalog*, which was published in a few evolving editions between 1968 and 1972. Compiled and edited by Stewart Brand (who also played a role in the computer think tank that inspired Steve Jobs), this impressive phone-book-like publication preceded the internet—in fact it was *our* internet!

The catalog provided access to the tools and resources needed to do just about anything, from building geodesic domes to motorcycle maintenance. In the middle of the last edition, I landed upon a section on musical instrument making—harpsichords, thumb pianos, mountain dulcimers!—a letter from Gurian Guitars, a Stewart-MacDonald banjo parts catalog for 25 cents, and Irvine Sloane's book *Classic Guitar Construction*.

Big deal, you say.

Well, it was a big deal. Prior to this, instrument making was very secretive. Aside from an early book by Arthur Overholtzer, there were scarcely any instructional manuals on the subject. The few luthiers that were around typically didn't share any information, especially about how to build instruments that would ultimately compete in their limited marketplace.

Many thousands of young bohemian compatriots were seeing the same information in *The Whole Earth Catalog*, and a generation of young luthiers started trying their hand at guitar making. Soon,

Sloane and David Russell Young each added a book on steel-string guitar construction. The Guild of American Luthiers (G.A.L.) and the Association of Stringed Instrument Artisans (A.S.I.A.) championed the notion of sharing technical information about instrument making. Both organizations held biannual conventions and symposiums where luthiers could exhibit their instruments, access wood and tool suppliers, attend lectures, and network with other builders. The friendships and collaborations generated from these heady days have been a significant force in the industry and in the initiation of what many consider to be the current golden age of lutherie.

We reached out to a small cross-section of pioneering luthiers who were part of this vital scene. Among the first, Michael Gurian presided over a band of gypsies that would become first-rate luthiers in their own right, from the classical maker Thomas Humphrey to Michael Millard of Froggy Bottom Guitars. Linda Manzer emerged from apprenticeships with the Canadian guitar maker Jean-Claude Larrivée and the American archtop luthier James D'Aquisto to arrive at her own bold and coveted designs.

Richard Hoover developed a passionate client base through his brand, Santa Cruz Guitar Company, to become one of the leading high-end makers, and Steve Klein borrowed ideas from scientific research in creating radical designs that challenged the notion of what an acoustic guitar could do. While these four luthiers' instruments are quite dissimilar in terms of design and execution, they all contributed to the evolution of the steel-string guitar as we know it today.

COURTESY OF MICHAEL GURIAN





Michael Gurian (standing center with guitar) and his shop workers in the late 1960s.

Michael Gurian

We Thought We Could Change the World

How did it occur to you to make a guitar for the first time?

My scene started in the '60s, when I would find a broken guitar in the street and try to fix it. Then, when I was teaching guitar out on Long Island, in the first accredited guitar school [the Guitar Workshop] in the United States, I needed another guitar, so I built one.

Eventually I set up my shop in the West Village [of New York City] on Carmine Street. I built classical guitars for many of the major players of the time, and became friends with groups like the Lovin' Spoonful, the Mothers, and The Band, and then the folkie people like Bob Dylan and Richie Havens. They were all my customers. John Sebastian of the Spoonful, who was a neighbor of mine, convinced me to start building steel-string guitars, and that marked the beginning of Gurian Guitars, which existed until 1982.

Talk more about what it was like to make your first guitar at a time when there was a dearth of resources.

Basically, I copied a classical guitar I owned. The builders of the time were not willing to share any information. There was one guy who I became fairly friendly with, Victor Manuel Pineiro, who worked with Manuel Velazquez, and he gave me a couple of pointers, but that was about it. I built that first guitar in a studio apartment out on Long Island near where I was teaching, using bricks, rubber bands, rope, and a lot of sandpaper. For bending the sides, I used a tin can with a Bernzomatic torch.

Did the playing styles of Sebastian, Dylan, and other notable clients inform the design of your guitars?

You always get input from everyone you interact with; if you keep your eyes and ears open, you learn a lot. That's why I became a really good classical builder for concert players—I watched them play, listened to what they had to say and how they heard things.

But as for the steel-string, the changes in design were my own. I just didn't want to make another dreadnought. I wanted something that wasn't too bass-y, and so I came up with the size 3, a very crisp- and clean-sounding midsize guitar. (See Great Acoustics on page 98.) If you struck a chord, you could hear every single note and yet all the notes worked together.

After branching out to making steel-strings in New York, you moved to New Hampshire to start a much larger operation.

Well, we had quite a few employees because we had not only a guitar factory, but a mail-order company. I also had a big sawmill and supplied woods, cutting about 15 million feet a year in lumber and another 15 million feet in veneer. That was not just for the guitar world, but for pianos and harpsichords, canoes and kayaks, pool sticks, you name it. It was indeed a big operation we had, and we were probably the second most advanced factory in the United States, Ovation being the first with its connection to the helicopter company and all that. [Company founder Charles Kaman used technology from his work in helicopter design for the synthetic, rounded backs of Ovation guitars. —Ed.]

'I remember resawing huge logs of ebony for fingerboards and mahogany for necks. It was a bit Wild West.'

— LINDA MANZER

And that was decades before CNC machinery was commonplace in guitar factories.

Right, exactly. We built a lot of machinery. We had two machine shops, one for the sawmill, because we built all our own blades for everything there, and the other to maintain the guitar factory. So we built all specialized machines and they worked out really well.

You stepped away from guitar making in the early 1980s. Was that due to economics, or the fire your factory suffered in 1979?

Well, we had that major fire, where I lost a 35,000-square-foot building with everything. Guitar makers get sick when I tell them what was in there. I had accumulated quite a bit of really rare woods. Then, there was the [early 1980s global] recession, not to mention my health. I was on a baseball team and wiped out my right fibula and ankle sliding into third base, and it took me two years to learn how to walk again.

But I did keep my fingers in it, supplying parts for the guitar industry and doing some consulting work and helping set up guitar factories for Lowden, Guild, and Giannini. And I'm still friends with just about everyone in the industry—friendships that go back for about 40 to 45 years. Those were great times in the 1970s, with a lot of wonderful music, and people having their spirits filled right up to the top, thinking that we could change the world and make it a better place.

Linda Manzer

Legends in the Mist

What was your entree into the world of lutherie?

In high school I wanted to be a folk singer. I was inspired by artists like Joni Mitchell and James Taylor. In 1969, after seeing Joni Mitchell perform on a dulcimer at the Mariposa Folk Festival, I went to the Toronto Folklore Centre to buy one, but it was too expensive for me. Luckily a fellow at the store convinced me to buy a kit and assemble it myself. I was sure I couldn't assemble it and he was sure I could. Thank you, Paul Hornbeck—you changed my life.

I graduated high school and went to two different art colleges, but in the back of my mind there was this hunger to continue making musical instruments, and I began to look for a teacher. Someone told me about Jean-Claude Larrivée operating out of Toronto, my hometown, and I basically bugged him until he hired me.

I started with Larrivée in 1974. Obviously there was no internet back then and only one book on guitar making that I knew of, by David Russell Young, which was wonderful but light on details. Realistically the only way to really learn was to apprentice with somebody. And there were no supply houses with guitar makers' tools and jigs; you had to make them and invent them yourself. Same with the woods—I remember resawing huge logs of ebony for fingerboards and mahogany for necks. It was a bit Wild West.

What was it like to work at the Larrivée shop?

It was a traditional apprenticeship; I began by sweeping the floors and going for coffee and worked my way up to a senior apprenticeship, where I was bracing tops and backs and assembling six guitar bodies a week. It was old-school and intense—and incredibly fun. I learned by watching and doing. I figure we made about 1,500 instruments while I was there. For three-and-a-half years, the handful of apprentices would have these wonderful discussions about every aspect of guitar building during our coffee breaks and over lunch. I am still really close friends with those original apprentices.



Michael Gurian



Linda Manzer makes her first archtop, in James D'Aquisto's Long Island, New York, workshop.

How was information shared between builders in those days?

You would hear through the grapevine that there were other builders out there, but they were kind of legends in the mist. I learned there was a guy called Gurian somewhere in New England and some guy with a tiny shop in San Diego called Bob Taylor, whom Larrivée eventually became good friends with. And of course Martin was the gold standard.

Larrivée was certainly influenced by Martin's tooling and assembly methods, but he relied heavily on his European classical guitar background when designing his own instruments. And as he was the grandfather of Canadian guitar building, all of his apprentices inherited that European design sense from him. At that time, you could definitely see a distinct difference between Canadian and U.S. building styles, which were mostly based on Gibson and Martin designs.

You also studied with James D'Aquisto, a decidedly different apprenticeship.

Yes, it was a different situation. Jimmy would build a few guitars at a time, mostly for individual players. He had a really intuitive approach to each instrument. You got the sense he was bringing something to life; anyone who knew Jimmy was definitely aware of the passion attached to his instruments. Besides showing me the technical skills involved in making an archtop, the most important thing Jimmy taught me was to trust my instincts. I was incredibly lucky to have two such brilliant and different teachers. Both gave me a great foundation and skill set to find my own path in lutherie.

Richard Hoover

A Beautiful Bit of Serendipity

Growing up in an agricultural California, how did you get into guitar making?

My childhood was in a different era—I must have been about 13 when The Beatles played on *The Ed Sullivan Show*—and most of my friends made *something*: They fixed their bikes or made go-karts; there was woodshop all the way from junior high. I also had a huge advantage because my father had a home shop. He was a commercial artist, and I helped him set up local window displays. So, from an early age I was familiar with woodworking and had the fundamentals down. It never crossed my mind that building a guitar was something I couldn't do.

Playing guitar was a rite of passage for most of us—your entree into high levels of social acceptance. The first guitar I bought with my own money was a Harmony H150, and I took it apart, thinking that I could discover things about how it was made and then put it back together. My mom

was the search engine of her day—a reference librarian—and she got me every available book on instrument building, but it was all violin stuff.

Later, when I moved to Santa Cruz in 1972, my Martin D-28 got stolen, and that put me on the odyssey to finance the Epiphone Texan I found to replace it. It turns out that a loan officer I visited, Bruce McGuire, was a classical-guitar maker who studied under Arthur Overholtzer. So I had my first formal training under him, and he introduced me to Jim Patterson, who wrote the bible on pearl inlays and who was also in Santa Cruz. Both were really gracious and helpful in my development as a guitar maker.

After you started the Santa Cruz Guitar Company, in 1976, how did you seek out clients?

You made a guitar and you tried to attract

'It never crossed my mind that building a guitar was something I couldn't do.'

— RICHARD HOOVER

attention; you wrote letters, you made phone calls. One of the early people who believed in us was Dean Kamei of Guitar Solo [an instrument shop and music publisher] in San Francisco. We drove up, showed him a guitar, and he literally bought it out of our hands.

But we might as well have been on Mars. There was not really a network yet to get the word out, but we finally were able to scratch enough dough together to run an ad in *Frets* magazine. Our little black-and-white ad was probably only about four postage stamps big, and it really hurt our wallet. But it was a way to let the world know, and that was really huge. It's what attracted the attention of Eric Clapton, who sent us a handwritten letter—a beautiful bit of serendipity.

Also, one summer I worked with [violinist] Darol Anger making mandolins, and Darol went off to try out for some obscure band in Mill Valley that was run by [mandolinist] David Grisman. Darol brought his band mate Tony Rice down to visit Santa Cruz—at the time I think

we'd only made four guitars. So we had Eric Clapton on one hand and Tony Rice on the other to brag about, and that was credibility—all of a sudden our guitars became hip and inside. The value of celebrity association was huge.

Concurrently with that, we began making guitars for the Windham Hill crowd, guitarists like Michael Hedges and Daniel Hecht, and also Robbie Basho. They were all playing this really sophisticated stuff on dreadnoughts, and it wasn't working on those bass-heavy instruments. The introduction to those people was also beautiful because from that came our fingerstyle model—and being taken really seriously as steel-string artisans rather than just a brand of steel-string.

It sounds like such a different scene than these days, when everything is so connected.

You could develop a network back then, but it was slow-moving. The beauty of that time was that everybody was learning, everybody was in the dark, and we needed each other desperately. The people that were independent, that had their secrets and so forth, you probably never heard of, as they didn't survive. It's those of us who shared with each other and developed the modern body of knowledge for the steel-string guitar that did thrive, because we buoyed and supported each other through it all.

Steve Klein

Crashing Concerts to Peddle Guitars

What are the origins of your life in lutherie?

I'd been playing folk music and had a cheap Framus acoustic guitar. And then my next-door neighbor came home with a drum set and I wanted to get an electric. And I thought, "Well, maybe I can build one, because I don't have enough money for both an amp and a guitar." So, that's pretty much when it all started, back in high school. And then very early on, through my grandfather, I met Michael Kasha [the physical chemist and molecular spectroscopist who also had a role in guitar design] and the whole acoustic interest reared its head.

How did you start building acoustic guitars?

It was interesting, because there were so few resources. I bought my first tools and some wood from Europe. My dad was born in Austria, so I knew of the violin world and just ordered supplies from European catalogs. Where I grew up, in the San Francisco Bay Area, there were a few builder/repair kinds of people, and I pestered them to death and tried to learn as much as I could piecemeal.

After a friend of a friend had a nice Martin dreadnought that got dropped on the kitchen floor, he handed it to me in pieces and said, "Do



Richard Hoover



Steve Klein

whatever you want to it.” So I took off the back and bridge, redid the bracing, and put the whole thing back together with a Kasha-style bridge. We thought it sounded really great. I wish I knew where that guitar was now.

Talk more about how you met Kasha, and the role he played in your early career.

My grandfather Joel Hildebrand was a pioneering chemist who had the chemistry building on the UC Berkeley campus named after him. Michael was a visiting professor at the time, and I met him at a garden party in my grandfather’s backyard. He and his son had just started the Suzuki method to learn to play guitar together, and his curiosity got the better of him. He stuck a mirror inside a [cheap student] guitar and said, “It shouldn’t be like this at all.”

Michael had some really cool ideas that I tried to adapt, but I was kind of stumbling along on my own, until I met Richard Schneider, a wonderfully insane classical builder that Michael had worked with in Detroit. Richard was a good enough builder to pull off Michael’s theories, none of which do any good until you can build a decent guitar. Richard and I collaborated somewhat apart and met each other once a year or so at different shows. So that connection was really important.

What was it like to realize the Kasha designs on steel-string guitars?

I had to overcome structural-tension stuff that the classical people didn’t have to worry about nearly as much, and thus came up with what I call the flying brace, which I still use today in a refined form. I also started to use carbon fiber, to keep the structure light and rigid. It wasn’t until then that I felt I had gotten to a point with my designs where I could build a really stable instrument. As a side note, now we can get carbon fiber from aerospace companies that make these nice sheets, but back then, David Russell Young was actually cooking carbon sheets on an old stove that we had in my garage.

How did you establish yourself as a luthier?

I always knew I wasn’t going to be very prolific, so the idea of building a Martin copy or whatever just made no sense to me. I wanted to stand out visually as well, and the Kasha ideas lent themselves to that. At a certain point, I decided to take some guitars to someone whose feedback wouldn’t be influenced by what the instruments looked like. So I went to Doc Watson [who was blind] with three jumbo acoustics. He set one in his lap, ran his hands over it, and said, “This is the strangest guitar I’ve ever seen!” Doc gravitated toward one of the guitars in particular, which had walnut back and sides and a flamed redwood top,

with probably about seven grain lines per inch. No one in their right mind would have built with that wood, as it was much more like a speaker cone than a guitar top. Doc Watson was blown away when I told him what the materials were, and that kind of opened a door.

How did you find other clients?

I used to crash concerts, which was much easier to do back then. I would get there early and kind of weasel my way in, offering to set up the stage and this and that. In the spring and summer of ’74, I spent almost every weekend at the Greek Theater [on the UC Berkeley campus], and that actually did get me my first sale with Dan Peek of the group America.

I also used to go down to L.A. and just go wherever I could get in to show my guitars.

‘Doc Watson set one in his lap, ran his hands over it, and said, “This is the strangest guitar I’ve ever seen!”’

— STEVE KLEIN

That’s how in 1977 I got to make Joni Mitchell an acoustic, specifically to support her low open tunings. On one visit I encountered a dulcimer maker, Joellen Lapidus, who had built an instrument for Joni. I asked if she could put us in touch, but she didn’t have Joni’s number. But she did know [singer-songwriter] J.D. Souther [who was in Mitchell’s circle], so she called him, and we arranged for me to show him my guitars at the office on Sunset Boulevard the following day. He looked up at me and said, “Has Joni seen these yet?” I said no, and he said, “Look, she’s just down the block. Let me give her a call.”

So about 15 minutes later she’s there . . . all this amazing synchronicity just could not happen today. She then invited me into the studio for the album that she was working on, *The Hissing of Summer Lawns*, at the A&M studios the following night; we played my guitars up against her Martin. And that’s when she said, “I want one.”

AG



COURTESY OF STEVE JAMES

ARTIFACT OF AN ERA

Steve James restores his early-1970s guitar

In 1970, as an employee of Gurian Guitars in New York, Steve James began work on his first guitar, a nylon-string. He continued the project in the apartment he shared at the time with the luthier Thomas Humphrey, but set it aside to work on other projects. “I finally finished the guitar after leaving New York, in a house in the woods outside of Poughkeepsie,” says James, a renowned blues and roots guitarist and AG contributor.

James recalls Gurian insisting that every component, including the fretboard and the marquetry soundhole rosette, be made by hand. No forms or molds were involved in the guitar’s construction; rather it was built straight off a board, in the traditional Spanish manner. “I used a side-bending device cobbled out of a heating element and a piece of pipe,” James says. “That and a lightbulb were the only things plugged in. Tools sharp enough to shave with were the rule at Gurian.”

James gifted the completed guitar to his sister, also a musician, and would periodically check in on it. After having spent some time neglected in storage, the instrument developed cracks. James has not built an instrument in decades, but he often repairs instruments, so he recently fixed the cracks on his old guitar, and while he was at it did a refret and some finish touchup. He reports that the instrument sounds bright and loud, with good intonation and action. “It makes me feel like building another one, which Michael [Gurian] said is a sure sign that I’m losing my mind,” James says, laughing. —Adam Perlmutter

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SHAWN RODGERS

Resistance Fighters

Defeating those self-imposed barriers to practicing

BY PAUL MEHLING

Everyone knows that practice makes perfect, but do we really take this to heart? In my many years as a teacher, I've heard every excuse for not practicing: There's not enough time; it's not fun; it hurts too much; I'm not making progress; I'm stuck; or I'm just not inspired enough to practice. It's very convenient to avoid practicing—and you probably have your own numerous excuses—but there's no getting around the simple truth that you need to do it in order to improve.

Not unlike the voice of your conscience, your inner musician is either a cheerleader ("You can do this!") or an Eeyore ("Why bother? Somebody else is already better than I am."). And that inner musician can change from day to day, depending upon your desire level. I'd like to help you identify which voice you're obeying and how to stay on the sunny side of your inner battle.

1 I'M UNINSPIRED

What is your inspiration? As musicians, we're usually chasing some kind of sound. It

might be the pristine classical guitar of Andrés Segovia, the gymnastic lines of Julian Lage, or the dulcet tones of [name your favorite guitarist]. These are often our initial inspirations, and remembering why you chose the guitar in the first place might be a good motivation to pick it up again and again. Remember, too, that listening is almost as good as practicing, and if you can't get yourself into the woodshed, you can certainly make the effort to listen deeply to your heroes.

It can also help to be in the habit of getting in touch with your desire to play better.

This is a daily ritual for almost all the musicians I know—good, great, or otherwise. Sometimes it's a conscious thought: "I gotta get out of bed and get back to that thing I'm working on." Other times it might be a nagging thought in the back of your mind, like, "I haven't resumed the stuff I'm working on and it's getting late in the day." But regardless of the nature of the thought process, that desire to improve is usually

there in some form or another, and the more you can stay connected to it, the better.

2 THERE'S NOT ENOUGH TIME

When I was 18, I had a teacher who asked me why I was not practicing. He then wrote down all of the reasons I mentioned, basically the stuff of everyday life, and asked how long each distraction might take. The sum of these activities—work at my part-time job (four hours), eating (one hour), sleeping (eight hours), etc.—was only 18 hours. That left a full six hours to practice! So why couldn't I squeeze in one or two hours?

No matter how busy and unrelenting your schedule may be, you're going to have to carve out some time for musical improvement and perhaps push some other things down lower on your list of priorities. The good news is ten to 15 minutes a day is a great and easy goal to start with—and not just for beginners. You'll make way more progress with daily practice than four hours on one

day. All practice is good, but daily practice, not unlike compound interest, is the way to shorten your journey towards that sound you're chasing. Fifteen minutes will usually lead to 20 or 25, and if you get in the habit of doing that, you'll find 30 minutes is easier, then 45, etc.

3 IT HURTS

A common excuse is that it hurts too much to practice. Well, there's pain and then there's *pain*. If you're suffering from the latter, you should stop immediately and look at what you're doing and how you're doing it to see what you can do to change to a pain-free technique. A good teacher can help you here. Usually, pain is caused by using way more force than is needed. Most of the time, less is more—especially when it comes to the gripping of the pick, the pressing down on the strings, etc.

Sometimes pain comes from playing a guitar that is not set up properly or is at odds with your physiology (i.e., a guitar whose body is too small or too large for you, or a neck that is unmanageable for your hand size). This can be remedied by asking a teacher or shop to help you find the guitar that's the best fit for you. While we're on the subject, you might also consider the benefits to your musicality of having a healthy lifestyle that includes eating well and regular exercise. Playing any musical instrument can be a physically challenging task for your mind and body, and being in good shape can help improve your playing and your enjoyment when practicing.

4 I'M NOT GETTING ANY BETTER

Being stuck at a place where it feels that you can't break through to the next level can be crushing to your drive and inspiration. But you don't have to buy into this common excuse; you just need to see it from a different side, as evidence that you need to make a big push right now, while you're most frustrated. That big push can be something like tackling what you're stuck on with more frequent practice. Twice a day could help—you'd be amazed at how much you'll improve with just an additional 15- or 20-minute daily session.

You might also have an honest look at why you've reached a plateau. Are you, for instance, repeating the same mistakes by trying to play a challenging piece at tempo, rather than first perfecting it at half speed? (To address this problem, see *Here's How* in the January 2019 issue.) In any case, at the very least, making a big push when you're

least inclined to do so will help you prove to yourself that you have the grit, integrity, and burning desire that sparks most, if not all, of the musicians you admire.

5 IT'S JUST TOO FRUSTRATING

Pro tip: It's well documented that we get a little rush of endorphins in our bodies when we successfully complete small tasks. Remember how hard it was to learn how to tie your shoelaces? Sticking a key in a lock and making a door open? Easy now for sure. At first it took repetition, but once you got

the skill it felt so good. That's the endorphin rush. This happens to us all day long—barring heavy traffic, why do you think it's so much fun to drive a car?—and you can bring it into the practice room.

Practicing in such a way that you're not frustrated will lead to a body filled with endorphins that will make you feel confident and even inspired, which will obviously lead to a desire to spend more time practicing. Using this method, you may actually lose track of your time practicing and find that the clock has clicked past your usual quit time. **AG**

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Watch Your Back

Practicing healthy approaches to guitar posture

BY MICHAEL CHAPDELAINE

THE PROBLEM

You're unsure as to how to hold the guitar in a way that is ergonomically efficient, gives maximum mechanical advantage, is comfortable, and won't cause injury.

THE SOLUTION

Study the mechanics of both traditional and non-traditional approaches to posture, so that you can find the sitting position that will allow you to play the guitar without wrecking your back.

Nylon- and steel-string guitarists display great variety in posture, but it comes down to a common goal: to maximize one's leverage over the instrument, while putting the least strain possible on the body. Fortunately the days of "just do it like Segovia" are gone in the pedagogical world—as are the plagues of back and neck deterioration and neuromuscular disease among classical guitarists. Here are some steps to help keep you healthily seated with your guitar.

1 START WITH THE SPINE

Think of the confluence of body and guitar as a simple platform that will allow the left-hand fingers to squeeze the strings into the frets with ease and efficiency, as the right hand attacks the strings with comfort and accuracy. Your fretting hand requires an overwhelmingly greater amount of power than your picking hand, an imbalance that can result in an unhealthy posture if you don't work on it.

Our natural inclination is to twist the spine toward the guitar's neck and bend forward. While that position might give mechanical advantage and visual awareness of the guitar's fingerboard, it can cause permanent spinal damage. So, practice in front of a mirror, always making sure that your spine appears elongated and neutral, never twisted.

2 DETERMINE YOUR ARCHITECTURE

Your fretting hand needs to apply sufficient tensile pressure to the fretboard's entire length, on a classical guitar, typically around 13 inches

between the nut and 12th fret. The difference in the geometry of the hand varies up and down the neck, so reference the midpoints of the neck (string 4, fret 6) and your fretting hand (second finger) to help determine your architecture. Use the intersection of those two points to position the guitar such that minimal strain is put on the wrist, elbow, and shoulder. Then, modify your sitting and posture accordingly.

With your wrist and shoulder relaxed, your right elbow will flex to bring the hand near the strings; straightening the wrist brings your fingers to the strings. The arm crosses the rim of the guitar between mid-forearm and elbow, depending on your body dimensions and the method used to support the guitar. Put the entire weight of your arm on the guitar.

3 TRY DIFFERENT SUPPORTS

Using a footstool creates the most appealing posture for guitar technique—with both legs, the right arm, and the chest supporting the instrument—but the most toxic position for health. The problem is that the footstool requires that you sit with one foot higher than the other, and if you spend lots of time in this position, your musculature and spinal discs can become compromised.

That said, a footstool can help you get a feel for properly holding the guitar in one of the more ideal positions below. Put the guitar's waist on your raised left thigh and the heel on your proximal right thigh. Sit straight up, as if a thread is pulling the center of your head towards the heavens. Adjust the height of the footstool such that, with your left elbow flexed and wrist straight, your second fingertip intersects string 4 at fret 6, perpendicular to the plane of the fingerboard. Now bring your right arm across the rim of the guitar and relax everything, from head to toe.

I believe that a support such as the ErgoPlay is the best thing to happen to the classical-guitar community since nylon strings. This type of solution allows the guitar to be held in the traditional classical position without harming the spine, as both feet are flat on the floor. Attach the support to your guitar and use a chair whose height bends your knees at 90 degrees. Sitting up perfectly straight, adjust the height of the support in the same way you would a footstool; once again, place your right forearm over the guitar and relax.

My preferred alternative, like what many flamenco guitarists do, is to set the guitar on my right thigh, just forward of the lower bout, with the instrument's back pressed against my front-right torso. (In the video on AG's website, you can see me using this position while performing

A footstool helps support the guitar but can be hazardous for your back.



DIAGO BRANDAO

"Chapdelaine" [see score on page 50], an amazing new piece dedicated to me by the composer Dennis Hayes.) The guitar is off-axis from the plane of the chair's back by about 30–45 degrees, the instrument's neck raised at a slight angle on the headstock side. Place your right biceps on the lower bout and relax the weight of that arm, with the elbow right at the rim and the entire forearm over the soundboard.

Note that in this position, the guitar is less secure, as it is supported by just three points: the right leg, the weight of the right arm, and the chest. Rather than using my muscles to hold the guitar in place, I use an anti-slip product called a Sticky Pad, wetting it for permanent adherence to the intersecting points of the body and guitar. Admittedly, I am much more concerned about my body than my guitar's finish.

I'd recommend experimenting with these different approaches to find the position that works best for you. Remember, Segovia might have been lucky in that he used a footstool over the course of many decades and had the good fortune of escaping without injury. But get the sitting-position thing right—don't bet your spine on luck.

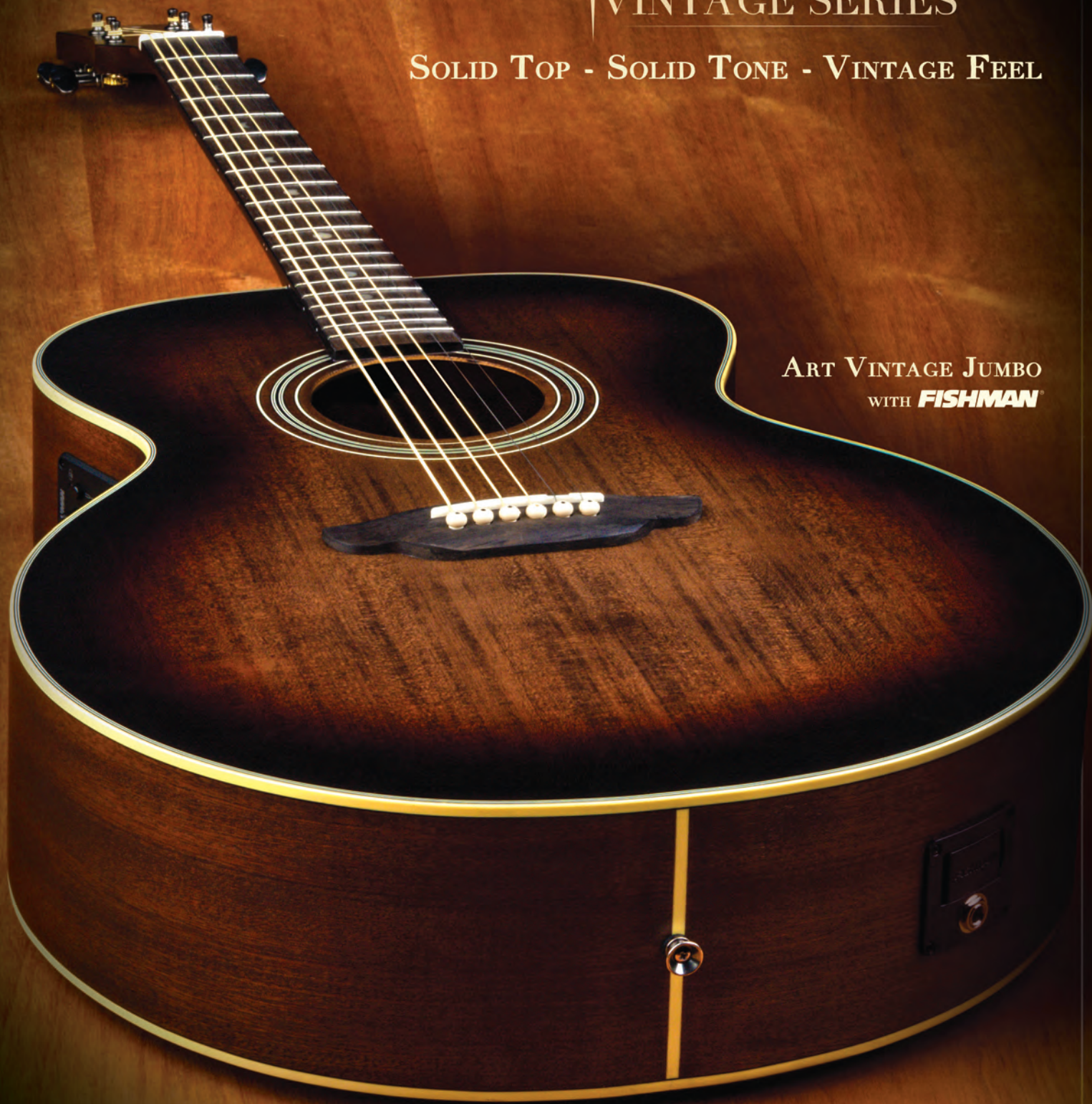
Michael Chapdelaine is the only guitarist to have ever won first prize in both prestigious classical (GFA International Classical Guitar Competition) and fingerstyle (National Fingerstyle Championship) competitions. He was a professor of music at the University of New Mexico for 33 years and performs and teaches internationally. michaelchapdelaine.com



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BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

While “Chapdelaine” isn’t forbiddingly difficult, it’s important to fall into the spirit of the piece, and to dial in a contrast between the A and B sections. “The outer A sections are rock ‘n’ roll, freedom, anarchy, bad boy. Really go with that,” Chapdelaine says. “The B section is all the stuff that might happen to that same spirit when you throw in discipline, knowledge, inquisitiveness, humility. Oh man, Dennis really nailed this work!”

MUSIC BY DENNIS HAYES

Libre

To Coda 2

[illegible]



A **Presto**

11

harm. harm. harp harm.

16

1. 2.

B

22

28

1. 2. To Coda 1 D.S. al Coda 1 (take repeat)

33

Coda 1

37

Cont. from p. 51

38

harm.

4

43

3

1

2

3

3

48

0

2

4

0

52

7

7

10

7

D.S.S. al Coda 2

Coda 2

56

3

1

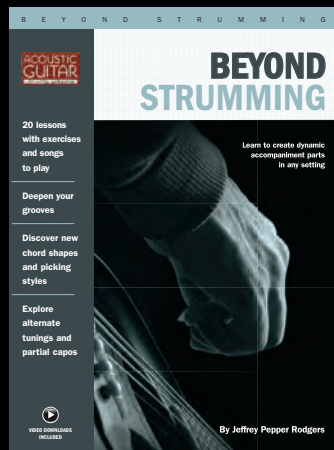
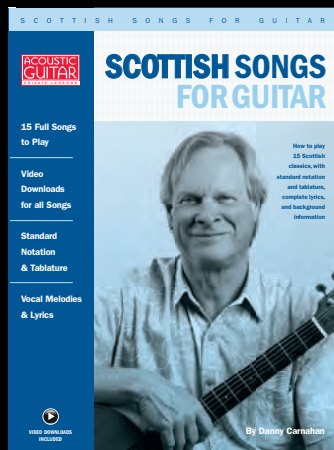
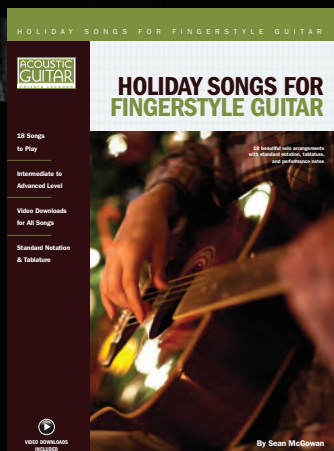
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PASCAL PCHASSIN

Uncloudy Day

John Fahey's weird but approachable treatment of a gospel standard

BY GWENIFER RAYMOND

“Uncloudy Day” is an 1879 gospel song by the Reverend Josiah Kelley Alwood, who was inspired by the sight of a rainbow, backed by an enormous black nimbus cloud in an otherwise clear sky, greeting him on the final leg of a long homeward-bound journey. It has been covered by many performers, including the Staple Singers, Willie Nelson, Johnny Cash, and Doc Watson, to name but a few, and here we’re going to talk about John Fahey’s instrumental interpretation for solo steel-string guitar.

My own relationship with Fahey’s music began when, after many years of playing guitar with grunge and punk outfits, I fell into a deep hole of early American blues and folk music. Inspired by players like Mississippi John Hurt, I began to study the alternating-thumb method

of fingerpicking, and it was during that period that I first heard a Fahey record. With that came the realization of how fantastically capable of emotionally intelligent, articulate, and surreal musical expression a solo guitar could be, and it changed the course of my own playing.

Fahey, who died in 2001 at 61, was similarly preoccupied with that old weird American sound (in fact, he wrote his master’s thesis on the music of Charley Patton) and his playing draws strong influence from those traditions. That said, Fahey was much more than an adept mimic. He incorporated minimalism, repetition, and dissonance to create avant-garde soundscapes, at once both beautiful and discomfiting, uncannily channeling his own perhaps difficult personality into notes on string.

QUINTESSENTIALLY FAHEY

Fahey’s version of “Uncloudy Day” was originally released on his 1959 debut, *Blind Joe Death*. He self-recorded and produced the album (becoming one of the first independent artists to do so), funding it by pumping gas, and with a \$300 loan from an Episcopal minister. Only 100 copies were made in its original run (pressed onto custom 78s via the Fonotone label run by friend and legendary record collector Joe Bussard), some of which were sent to academics and folklorists, and others secreted into the racks of record stores and Goodwill bins. Despite it having made no impression on the general American public at the time, *Blind Joe Death* has since been deemed by the Library of Congress to be “culturally, historically, or aesthetically important.”



Sitting in the middle of this album is "Uncloudy Day," (notation on p. 58) a quintessentially Fahey arrangement. The core melody is traditional, but a compulsive focus on repetition and tone, along with a restrained use of discordant transitions, imbues it with a transgressive sense of unease that is typical of the guitarist's best work. Fahey starts with his guitar tuned to open D7 (D A D F# A C), and plays a series of natural harmonics at the 12th, seventh, and fifth frets, tied together by militarily rhythmic monotone plucks of the low D string. At this point the track is not really recognizable to an unfamiliar listener as a gospel number, and when Fahey begins to retune his top string, it might even sound like some strange outtake of a recording gone wrong.

The maneuver is slick, however, and Fahey navigates the transition from open D7 to open D (D A D F# A D) and into the opening riff of the new segment with practiced ease. This transition of tunings poses the first real obstacle for a player studying this song. Using a scant few plucks for guidance, you need to train your ear to swiftly and accurately tune the top string from C to D (you're tuning a string to the root

note of the tune, which makes life a little easier). It's also important that any guiding plucks are played reasonably in time with the preceding bar, blending them into the tune.

FINGERPICKING IN WALTZ TIME

The main portion of the song has a bass line that requires the alternating thumb, a technique fundamental to most of Fahey's compositions, and one that is important to master. This is best achieved by starting slowly, playing only the bass notes (those on the bottom three strings), and repeating until your thumb becomes an autonomous entity, acting on its own volition.

This tune is played in 3/4 or waltz time, which complicates things a little, as alternating thumb is most commonly employed in 4/4 (or common time), where the thumb will move mostly between two sets of bass notes. In waltz time, the thumb plays one bass note on beat 1 and another on 2 and 3. The melody lines, usually situated on the top three strings, can then be picked with the index and middle fingers. (Some players use as many as all of their fingers, but Fahey didn't typically do this, nor do I.)

Classic bits of Fahey eccentricity are employed in bars 11, 23 and 43—bass-heavy chords that contain the flatted ninth (Gb), rubbing against the root (F). These moments of discord, along with the jaunty waltz timing of the piece, create the general sense of ill-ease that sits at the back of this song the whole way through.

Though he played the majority of "Uncloudy Day" with unwavering 3/4 alternating thumb, Fahey occasionally threw in an extra off-beat bass note at the end of a bar, as in measures 20 and 21. These moves, which might prove tricky to a newcomer, require the thumb to momentarily stray from its mechanical, repetitive action. But the off-beat notes aren't strictly necessary to capture the essence of the piece. The core of the genius of Fahey's music is its focus on mood and tone, and so those are the aspects most important to focus on. Everything else is dressing.

*Gwenifer Raymond is a Welsh composer and multi-instrumentalist based in Brighton, England. Her latest album is You Never Were Much of a Dancer (Tompkins Square Records).
gweniferraymond.com*



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Tuning: D A D F# A C
Militaristically

Tuning: D A D F# A D

*Play G-flat notes on repeats only.

Fill 1

[illegible]

26 **A7**

0 2 2 1 0 2 2 1 0 2 2 0 0 2 2 1

32

D

1.

The musical score for the first ending of 'D' consists of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It begins with a measure of two eighth notes (F#4 and A4) over a quarter note (F#3), followed by a measure of two eighth notes (A4 and B4) over a quarter note (G#3), and then a measure of two eighth notes (B4 and C5) over a quarter note (A3). This is followed by a double bar line and a measure of two eighth notes (C5 and B4) over a quarter note (A3), then a measure of two eighth notes (B4 and A4) over a quarter note (G#3), and finally a measure of two eighth notes (A4 and G#4) over a quarter note (F#3). The bottom staff is in bass clef and contains fret numbers for each note. The first three measures correspond to the first three measures of the top staff. The fourth measure has a double bar line and a measure of two eighth notes (3 and 2) over a quarter note (0), followed by a measure of two eighth notes (3 and 2) over a quarter note (0), and finally a measure of two eighth notes (0 and 0) over a quarter note (0). The score ends with a double bar line and a repeat sign.

2. *D.S. al Coda*

37

37

38

39

40

Coda

39

0 3 0 3

0 0 0 0

0 0 0 0

This is one way to create a full-band sound. A less involved method is to use dynamic song arrangements.



PANHANDLE PETE, ONE-MAN BAND, AT THE MOUNTAIN MUSIC FESTIVAL, ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA COURTESY OF LOMAX LOC_UP

Two-Hand Band

How to build dynamic song arrangements

BY JEFFREY PEPPER RODGERS

Think of how a full band arrangement of a song might unfold. Perhaps a lone guitar and voice carry the first verse, and then bass and drums kick in; more instruments and voices join to lift up the chorus; the intensity continues to build, before releasing with a sparse final verse; and a big chorus takes it home. Like the song itself, the arrangement is its own little journey.

Even if you're accompanying a song with one guitar, you can create that same kind of journey on your instrument. The key is using

dynamics, which come as much from what you leave out as what you play. If a band kicked off a song with every possible instrument playing full blast, there'd be nowhere to go but down in terms of volume and intensity, and the same is true of a single guitar part: if you start out playing all thick chords as hard as you can, you've boxed yourself in. By contrast—and the operative word here is *contrast*—a dynamic arrangement leaves space for the sound to get bigger or smaller, and evolve over the course of the song.

This lesson applies the dynamic arranging approach (further developed in my AG book/video *Beyond Strumming*) to the traditional song "Wayfaring Stranger." Each week you'll practice creating varied textures and grooves over the same chord progression. I've based the examples on a performance of the song by my duo Pepper and Sassafras (with guitar and

clarinet) that is posted, along with a video of the examples, on AG's website.

WEEK ONE

If you're not familiar with the haunting folk/gospel song "Wayfaring Stranger," check out the lead sheet on acousticguitar.com. The song repeats the same 32-bar form throughout, using Em, Am, and B7 chords in the first section and adding C and G in the second section.

Beginners' Tip #1

For palm muting, rest the side of your palm on the strings on top of the saddle or close to it on the fret-board side.

Beginners' Tip #2

For the accented backbeats, come down on the bass strings a little harder with the pick, and with your palm as well for an extra thump.



WEEK 1

Example 1
Freely

Moderately
Em

Am(add9) B11

I am a poor...

9 Am Em

17 Am B7 Em C G

I'm go-ing there...

24 C B7 Em

31 Am(add9) B7 Em

Accent the backbeat by hitting the bass strings a little harder, as in Tip #2.

Example 1 shows how the arrangement starts, up through the first verse. In the first three measures, play a short chord-melody intro using up-the-neck voicings of Am(add9) and B11 for a lush, jazzy sound. (In the duo version, the clarinet plays the intro melody and I just strum chords.) And then, in measure 3 (not counting the pickup measure), strip your part down to the bare minimum: a quarter-note pulse on the open sixth string. Add a little bit of palm muting if you wish. For the octave E in measure 3, fret the fifth string with your third finger. A lyric cue shows where the singing enters.

Opening the song like this, as if just the bassist were playing while the rest of the band sits out, creates an intimate feeling and invites an audience to lean in as the story begins: “I am a poor wayfaring stranger . . .”

When you go to Am in measure 9, fret the bass note on the sixth string. With your third finger at the seventh fret, your first finger is right in position for this.

Starting in measure 13, thicken your part slightly by adding some more octave Es over the Em chord—as a bass player might do—and also a quick F# over the B7 chord in measure 18. Note that the octave riff falls between lines of lyrics, to give the vocal the full spotlight.

When the progression shifts to C, in measure 21, continue the accompaniment similarly: mostly quarter-note bass notes with occasional touches of other chord tones. On the B7 in measure 28, slide up the third string for an understated end to the phrase. Only in the next bar do you start adding a few soft strums, using open-string chord shapes up the neck for Em and Am(add9). For the B7 in measure 34, fret the third and fifth strings with a first-finger barre, and the fourth string with your third finger.

WEEK TWO

When the second verse arrives, it's time to ramp up a bit. Bring in the drummer: switch to the more rocking groove in **Example 2**, using the octave and the seventh (the note D on Em and G on Am) and adding a percussive punch to the backbeats, as indicated with the accent marks (>). The edgier sound



is right in sync with the lyrics: “I know dark clouds will gather ’round me.”

When you arrive at the second section with the move to C, notice that you're now playing fuller chord voicings than in the first pass. The sound is slowly building as the story and song unfold.

For the last section of this verse, with the progression Em–Am–B7–Em (not shown in the notation), go back to playing something similar to the stripped-down pattern used at the end of Example 1, in measures 29 to 36.

WEEK THREE

So where to go from here in the arrangement? In the duo performance, after the second verse comes an instrumental solo (for more about that, see “Take It to the Next Level” on p. 64). But this week, let's go to the final verse, when it's time to break away from the drone bass.

Example 3 shows the basic accompaniment pattern used in the third verse over Em and Am. On both chords, play a bass note on beat 1, a full strum on beat 2, and then either a quarter-note (down) or eighth-note (down-up) strum on beat 4. For Em, use the same

fifth-position chord shape as before. Instead of an Am, use the more harmonically open Asus2, a voicing that fits the eerie mood well. At this point in the song, the guitar and vocals are at full intensity—in essence, the full band has kicked in, with a big backbeat.

Example 4 shows one way to play the Am–B7–Em changes in this climactic verse. For the B7, add in the open first string to make it a B7sus4. Then, on the second half of the verse, start using an alternating bass, as shown in **Example 5**. Since you've played a monotone bass up to this point in the song, this change to alternating has a real impact—it gives the progression a whole different type of momentum. On the G chord, throw in a little single-note bass riff, too, for additional movement. Again, because of the restraint of the guitar part in earlier verses, these new developments make a dramatic contrast.

Beginners' Tip #3

Even when you're playing full chords, resist the urge to add constant up-and-down-strums. Think like a drummer and focus on the backbeats.

Beginners' Tip #4

Always listen closely to the singer and play to support, not compete.



WEEK 2

Example 2

1. **Em** **Am**

2. **Em** **Am** **B7** **Em**

13 **C** **G** **B7**

Detailed description: This block contains the musical notation for Example 2. It consists of three systems of guitar and bass staves. The first system shows a melodic line in the treble clef and a bass line in the bass clef, both with fingerings. The second system continues the melody and bass line, with a key signature change to one sharp (F#) indicated by a key signature change symbol. The third system shows a key signature change to two sharps (F# and C#) and includes a double bar line with first and second endings. Chord names (Em, Am, B7, C, G) are placed above the corresponding measures.

WEEK 3

Example 3

Em **A₇sus2** **A₇sus2** **B₇sus4**

Detailed description: This block contains the musical notation for Example 3. It shows a single system of guitar and bass staves. The guitar staff has a melodic line with chords Em, A7sus2, A7sus2, and B7sus4. The bass staff has a bass line with fingerings. A double bar line is present after the second measure. A footnote below the staves states: "* Doubled B is eliminated in notation, for ease of reading."

Example 5

Em **C** **G**

Detailed description: This block contains the musical notation for Example 5. It shows a single system of guitar and bass staves. The guitar staff has a melodic line with chords Em, C, and G. The bass staff has a bass line with fingerings. A double bar line is present after the second measure.

WEEK FOUR

After the song reaches its climax in verse three, the last piece of the arrangement is the closing line and tag: “I’m only going over Jordan” followed by three repetitions of “I’m only going over home.” At this point, strip the guitar back down to a sparse pattern similar to what you played at the top, with the monotone bass and just a few light strums, as shown in **Example 6**.

Just for a subtle variation, the first four measures of Ex. 6 use a slightly different voicing of

Em than elsewhere. Play this whole section softly, bringing listeners close again. In the last four measures, over the ritard, return to the chord shapes you started with: Am(add9) and B7, and then a final Em11. The arrangement is literally coming full circle, as the narrator sings of “going home.”

When you’re working on your own guitar arrangements, think about ways to create this kind of dramatic arc during a song. You don’t necessarily have to start quietly and get

louder, but work on varying the textures to differentiate the sections from each other and to create growth and change in the song. Take your cue from the lyrics, and think of the guitar as not just providing the rhythm but telling a story.

Jeffrey Pepper Rodgers, the founding editor of Acoustic Guitar, is author of the recent AG Guide Beyond Strumming.
jeffreypepperrogers.com

WEEK 4

Example 6

Example 6 is a guitar arrangement in E minor, 4/4 time. It consists of two systems of music, each with a melody line and a bass line.

System 1: The melody line starts with a half note E4, followed by quarter notes G4, A4, B4, and C5. The bass line starts with a half note E2, followed by quarter notes G2, A2, B2, and C3. The first four measures use a specific voicing of Em. The next four measures use Am(add9) and B7. The final four measures use Em.

System 2: The melody line starts with a half note E4, followed by quarter notes G4, A4, B4, and C5. The bass line starts with a half note E2, followed by quarter notes G2, A2, B2, and C3. The first four measures use a specific voicing of Em. The next four measures use Am(add9) and B11. The final four measures use Em11. The section ends with a ritardando (rit.) marking.

TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

One great way to enhance your guitar arrangements is to add an instrumental break or riffs based on the melody. With “Way-faring Stranger” in the key of E minor, it’s pretty straightforward to play the melody while keeping the rhythm and harmony going. Just be sure to hit the appropriate root bass note on the first beat when the chord changes, to establish the new chord. This example shows the first four bars to get you started. Try picking out the rest of the melody from here.

This section shows the first four bars of an instrumental break. The melody line starts with a half note E4, followed by quarter notes G4, A4, B4, and C5. The bass line starts with a half note E2, followed by quarter notes G2, A2, B2, and C3. The first four measures use a specific voicing of Em. The next four measures use Am(add9) and B11. The final four measures use Em11. The section ends with a ritardando (rit.) marking.

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Ray Charles recorded the best-known version of “Georgia on My Mind” in 1960.



ERIC KOCH / ANEFO

Georgia on My Mind

Just an old, sweet song

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

“Georgia on My Mind,” with music and lyrics by Hoagy Carmichael and Stuart Gorrell, respectively, is among the most beloved tunes in the Great American Songbook. It has been interpreted by everyone from Louis Armstrong to Billie Holiday to James Brown to Willie Nelson, but the best-known version is the one that the legendary R&B singer Ray Charles recorded for his 1960 album *The Genius Hits the Road*.

This take on “Georgia” not only established Charles as a masterly interpreter outside of his genre of origin, it became a *Billboard* No. 1 hit and in 1979 was adopted as the state song of Georgia. But it came about only by accident, as Charles explains in the liner notes to his 1997 CD box set, *Genius + Soul*: “Had me a driver who’d always hear me humming ‘Georgia on My Mind.’ Cat said, ‘You hum it so much, why don’t you record it?’”

The notation here kicks off with an intro that captures the original string parts by arranger Ralph Burns. To make things easier to play on the guitar, I placed the first two bars an octave lower than the strings on the original recording, with the second two bars in the original octave. Play this part kind of languorously, taking advantage of the breathing room afforded by the open strings.

The bulk of the arrangement distills the wonderful jazz chords of the original Charles version into compact guitar voicings, most with just three or four notes, for a lean and uncluttered sound. For a bit of a textural contrast, in the bridge I’ve included fuller chords with ringing open strings. Note the use of the line cliché—the chromatic movement of B to C to C♯ on string 2 between the Em, Em(♭6), and Em6 chords—borrowed from the string arrangement. Before you play the piece, make sure that you can comfortably fret all of these shapes, and feel

free to change the fingerings to your liking—you could, for instance, play the G6 grip with your third finger, rather than fourth, on string 3.

Use any picking-hand pattern you’d like, but I’d recommend strumming in the manner of Freddie Green, the longtime guitarist with the Count Basie Orchestra. Basically, just play downstrokes in quarter notes, four to the bar, with a somewhat relaxed feel. (For more on this approach, see Ron Jackson’s Weekly Workout in the October 2015 issue or Whit Smith’s Western swing lesson in the May/June 2019 issue. You could also fingerpick the accompaniment, as ace guitarist Adam Levy does in the video on AG’s website.)

Charles was a gifted pianist, and the last two bars here approximate the bluesy phrases he plays at the song’s end, transposed down an octave to be playable on the acoustic guitar. As always, try adding a personal touch using your own embellishments here.

AG

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ROOTS AND BLUES FINGERSTYLE GUITAR EXPLORATIONS



By Steve James

GEORGIA ON MY MIND

WORDS BY STUART GORRELL, MUSIC BY HOAGY CARMICHAEL

Intro

♩ = 67 (♩ = ♩³)

Chord diagrams for the Intro:

- G**: 3xx00x
- G6/F#**: 2xxx00
- Em7**: 0x00xx
- E♭**: xx10xx
- E♭/D♭**: x2x1x1
- G/D**: xx02x1
- D9sus4**: x1111x
- D13**: xx1224 4 fr.

The Intro consists of a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody is written in 4/4 time. The bass line is indicated by numbers 0-7 on a single staff.

Verse

Chord diagrams for the Verse:

- G6**: 2x14xx
- B7/F#**: 2x13xx
- B7**: x213xx
- Em**: x1342x 7 fr.
- Dm6**: 2x13xx 9 fr.
- C7**: 2x34xx 8 fr.
- C#dim7**: 2x13xx 8 fr.

The Verse begins at measure 5. The melody is written in a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lyrics are: "Geor-gia, Geor-gia, the whole day through. Just an a song of you comes as".

1.

Chord diagrams for the first line of the Verse:

- G/B**: 2x13xx 5 fr.
- E7**: x213xx 6 fr.
- A7**: 2x34xx 5 fr.
- D7**: x213xx 4 fr.
- F7**: x213xx 7 fr.
- E7**: x213xx 6 fr.
- A7**: 2x34xx 5 fr.
- D7**: x213xx 4 fr.

The melody continues from measure 9. The lyrics are: "old sweet song keeps Geor-gia on my mind. I said a sweet and clear".

2.

Chord diagrams for the second line of the Verse:

- A7**: 2x34xx 5 fr.
- D7**: x213xx 4 fr.
- G6**: 2x14xx
- C7**: x213xx
- G6**: 2x14xx
- B7**: x213xx

The melody continues from measure 13. The lyrics are: "as moon - light through the pines."

Bridge

Chord diagrams for the Bridge:

- Em**: 02300x
- Em(♭6)**: 02301x
- Em6**: 02304x
- Em(♭6)**: 02301x
- Em**: 02300x
- Em(♭6)**: 02301x
- Em7**: 02304x
- A7 #11**: 2x311 4 fr.

The Bridge begins at measure 16. The melody is written in a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lyrics are: "Oth - er arms have reached out to me. Oth - er eyes smile ten - der - ly."

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20

Em 02300x
Em(b6) 02301x
Em7 02304x
F#7 1x243x
Bm7 2x333x 7 fr.
Bb7 #11 2x311x 5 fr.
A7 #11 2x311 4 fr.
D9 x2134x 4 fr.

Still in peace-ful dreams I see the road leads back to you. I said

Verse

24

G6 2x14xx
B7/F# 2x13xx
B7 x213xx
Em x1342x 7 fr.
Dm6 2x13xx 9 fr.
C7 2x34xx 8 fr.
C#dim7 2x13xx 8 fr.

Geor - gia, oh Geor - gia, no peace I find. Just an

28

G/B 2x13xx 5 fr.
E7 x213xx 6 fr.
A7 2x34xx 5 fr.
D7 x213xx 4 fr.

1. G6 2x14xx
C7 x213xx
G6 2x14xx
B7 x213xx

old sweet song keeps Geor - gia on my mind.

32

2. F7 x213xx 7 fr.
E7 x213xx 6 fr.
A7 2x34xx 5 fr.
D7 x213xx 4 fr.

mind. I said just an old sweet song keeps Geor - gia on my

Free time

36

G7 2x34xx
C7 x213xx
G7 1x12xx
Ab7 1x12xx 4 fr.
G7 1x12xx
G7#9 x2134x 9 fr.

mind.

3 4 5 5 4 3 11 10 9 10 0 8 10 11 15 15



Rabon (left) and Alton Delmore



COURTESY OF DEBBY DELMORE/DELMOREBROTHERS.NET

Wabash Blues

Tackling the Delmore Brothers' trademark harmonies

BY JAMIE STILLWAY

Known for their deft guitar duos and close harmony singing, the Delmore Brothers (Alton and Rabon) were popular performers on the Grand Ole Opry in the 1930s. In the introduction to Alton's intriguingly titled autobiography, *The Truth Is Stranger Than Publicity*, music historian Charles Wolfe recognizes the duo's historical significance "as a vital transitional act in country music, one linking the blues, ragtime, parlor songs, and shape-note gospel singing of the rural 19th-century South with the polished, complex, media-oriented styles of more modern times."

"Wabash Blues," written by Dave Ringle and Fred Meinken, first became a hit song with a 1921 recording by bandleader Isham Jones, and has since been covered by artists ranging from jazz musicians like Duke Ellington to pop acts like Les Paul and Mary Ford. This arrangement is inspired by the version of "Wabash Blues" that the Delmore Brothers recorded in 1939 for the Bluebird label, available on the four-disc set *Classic Cuts 1933–1941* (JSP Records).

The music uses *divisi* notation, which is a method of consolidating multiple parts on one staff. Here, the up-stemmed notes are played by Guitar 1 and the down-stemmed ones by Guitar 2. Though the song is notated in cut time, it might be easiest to count as if it were in 4/4, playing the downbeats (or the numbers) with downstrokes, and the upbeats (or the "ands") with upstrokes.

Melodically speaking, the tune basically outlines chord tones, with a chromatic run offsetting each phrase. For example, the song begins with a harmonized chromatic approach to the A chord, and then Guitar 1 plays the root (A), while Guitar 2 covers the third (C#). This idea continues throughout the verse, albeit with some voicing variations. Rhythmically speaking, both guitar parts are fairly straightforward, with a few syncopated phrases sprinkled here and there. I'd recommend playing with a loose picking hand and keeping a fairly steady alternating pick direction. The one tricky chord to

finger might be the B \flat , but it is worth the effort, for it gives this song a little harmonic kick!

While this arrangement is for two guitars, you could also play it as a solo piece, although you might find a few passages in which the harmonized parts would be challenging, due to the string spacing. Also, note that in the accompanying video, my duet partner, Eric Skye, plays his part in dropped-D tuning, adding strummed chords to his lines. In the verse, the lyrics are provided for reference and to highlight the vocal harmonies. Though the harmonized melody sounds great on two guitars as written, I play it on one guitar, in double-stops, while Eric strums the chords.

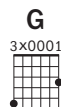
As evidenced by the video, this tune's inherent nature as a fun and approachable jam is quickly revealed. On AG's website, you can find a full version in which our solos are transcribed. Whether or not you learn them note for note—which I highly recommend—"Wabash Blues" would be a great song to have in your quiver of tunes for your next musical gathering. **AG**

Capo I

Chords (Standard Tuning)



Chords (Dropped-D Tuning)



Intro

$\text{♩} = 106$

Guitar 1 *divisi* **A7** **D**

Guitar 2 (dropped D)

2 3 4 | 5 5 5 5 5 5 | 5 0 2 3 2 | 3 3 3 3 3 3 | 3 2 3 4

0 1 | 2 2 2 2 2 2 | 2 0 4 | 0 0 0 0 0 0 | 0 4 0 1

4 | . | . | 0 0 0 0 0 0 | 0 4 0 1

5 **A7** **D**

5 5 5 5 5 5 | 5 0 2 3 2 | 3 3 3 3 3 3 | 3 10 10 10

2 2 2 2 2 2 | 2 2 0 4 | 0 0 0 0 0 0 | 0 7 7 7

2 2 2 2 2 2 | 2 2 2 2 2 2 | 2 2 2 2 2 2 | 2 2 2 2 2 2

10 10 10 10 10 10 | 12 12 10 10 7 | 5 5 5 5 5 5 | 5 5 5 5 5

8 8 8 8 8 8 | 8 0/8 8 3/8 0/8 | 3 3 3 3 3 3 | 3 3 3 3 3

0 0 0 0 0 0 | 5 | 2 2 2 2 2 2 | 2 2 2 2 2 2

5

G **D**

10 10 10 10 10 10 | 12 12 10 10 7 | 5 5 5 5 5 5 | 5 5 5 5 5

8 8 8 8 8 8 | 8 0/8 8 3/8 0/8 | 3 3 3 3 3 3 | 3 3 3 3 3

0 0 0 0 0 0 | 5 | 2 2 2 2 2 2 | 2 2 2 2 2 2

10 10 10 10 10 10 | 12 12 10 10 7 | 5 5 5 5 5 5 | 5 5 5 5 5

8 8 8 8 8 8 | 8 0/8 8 3/8 0/8 | 3 3 3 3 3 3 | 3 3 3 3 3

0 0 0 0 0 0 | 5 | 2 2 2 2 2 2 | 2 2 2 2 2 2

5

B \flat 7 **A7**

6 6 6 6 6 6 | 6 1 3 4 | 5 5 5 5 5 5 | 5 2 3 4

3 3 3 3 3 3 | 3 0 1 | 2 2 2 2 2 2 | 2 4 0 1

3 3 3 3 3 3 | 3 3 | 4 |

*Guitar 1 plays notes to right of slashes.

Cont. on p. 70

WABASH BLUES

Cont. from p. 69

D

17

5 5 5 5 5 5 | 5 0 2 3 2 | 3 3 3 3 3 3 | 3 2 3 4

2 2 2 2 2 2 | 2 0 4 | 0 0 0 0 0 0 | 0 4 0 1

A7 D

21

5 5 5 5 5 5 | 5 0 2 3 2 | 3 3 3 3 3 | 10 10 10

2 2 2 2 2 2 | 2 0 4 | 0 0 0 0 0 | 7 7 7

G D

25

10 10 10 10 10 10 | 0/12 10 7 | 5 5 5 5 5 5 | 5 2 3 4

8 8 8 8 8 8 | 8 3/8 0/8 | 3 3 3 3 3 3 | 3 4 0 1

0 0 0 0 0 0 | | 2 2 2 2 2 2 | 2 4 0 1

A7 D

29

5 5 5 5 5 5 | 5 0 2 3 2 | 3 3 3 3 3 | 3

2 2 2 2 2 2 | 2 0 4 | 0 0 0 0 0 | 0

Verse

2nd time, instrumental solo

A7 D A7

33

8 8 8 8 8 8 | 8 8 8 8 8 8 | 8 8 8 8 8 8 | 8 8 8 8 8 8

Oh, _____ those Wa - bash blues. I know _____

2 2 2 2 2 2 | 0 0 2 4 | 4 5 | 3 2 | 2 2



38 **D** **G** **D**

— I got my dues. A lone - some soul am I. —

0 0 2 4 4 5 3 5 3 4 0 1 3 0 2 4

44 **B \flat 7** **A7**

I feel — that I could die. — Can -

3 2 3 3 3 2 3 0 1 2 2 2

50 **D** **A7** **D**

- dle light that gleams, — most - ly in my dreams. —

0 0 2 4 4 5 2 2 0 0 2 4 4 5

56 **G** **D** **A7**

— I'll pack — my walk - ing shoes to lose —

3 5 0 1 3 0 2 4 3 2 2 2

62 **1., 2. D** **3. D**

— those Wa - bash blues. blues. —

0 0 2 4 4 5 2 3 5 7 2 3 4 5

Oh Shenandoah

A classic North American folk song, arranged with rich details

BY KATE KOENIG



Maurice Tani

“Oh Shenandoah,” sometimes called “Shenandoah” or “Across the Wide Missouri,” is an American folk heirloom which, ironically, was most likely written by French-Canadian fur traders in the 16th century. As the traders often did business with Native Americans in what is now known as the Great Lakes region, the earliest version of the song—and the one we sought to capture in our example—is speculated to have been about a romantic relationship between one of the fur traders and the daughter of Oneida Iroquois chief John Skenandoa. The song has been covered by everyone from Glen Campbell to Bob Dylan to Jerry Garcia.

Although adaptations of “Shenandoah” for solo voice and guitar are widespread, it originated as a sea shanty, a song form whose melody is meant to alternate between a soloist and chorus. It was only in the late 1800s that “Shenandoah” was published, its earliest appearance being in *The New Dominion Monthly* in 1876 under the title “Shenadore.” Folklorists further analyzed its origins in a few texts in the 1880s and ’90s that documented American folk songs. In *Studies in Folk-Song and Popular Poetry*, author Alfred Mason

writes, “[Sea shanties] have various forms—a continued and unbroken melody, as when turning the capstan or pumping, or they show an emphatic accentuation at regular intervals, as when stretching out a bowline with renewed pulls.” He continues, “Shenandoah” is a “good specimen” of a bowline chant.

You can see what’s meant by this description if you take a look at the lyrics, in which the second and fourth lines of each verse stay the same. The first and third lines are meant to be sung by an individual, while the second and fourth are to be chorused back by the crew. It’s less common that you come across recordings in this shanty style, but some online include one performance on YouTube by the all-male choir Before the Mast, and a recording by the Storm Weather Shanty Choir.

Passed down over hundreds of years, countless versions of the song have been written, with as many lyrical variations as there are arrangers. Especially during the Civil War, the word “Shenandoah” was often replaced by the name of a lover. This arrangement, by the singer-songwriter Maurice Tani, is fairly straightforward, but there are some details that set it apart from the most basic folk

accompaniment. For one, instead of a full open G chord, Tani uses a four-note G5 shape, with the A and high E strings deadened by the third and fourth fingers, respectively. This way, only low and midrange Gs and Ds are heard, making for a punchier sound without the added information of the chord’s third (B).

Tani also uses two types of D chords, one a basic open shape, and the other with the third (F#) on the low E string. He plays the latter grip with his second finger on the sixth string, but feel free to wrap your thumb around the neck to fret the low F# if that’s more comfortable to you. Other less common chords—at least in this type of setting—include the Em7–A7sus4 move. For efficient switching, keep your fourth finger on the D on string 2 for both chords.

As for the right hand, try the fingerpicking patterns shown below. In the third pattern, note the smooth way in which the bass line travels between G5 and Em7, the two chords connected on the “and” of beat 2 with a low F#. Also, be sure to check out the video on AG’s website, in which Tani’s vibrato and simple vocal touches lend an earnest quality to this folk gem. **AG**

OH SHENANDOAH

TRADITIONAL

Accompaniment Patterns

Diagram illustrating the accompaniment patterns for the song "Oh Shenandoah". The patterns are shown for the D, G5, D/F#, G5, Em7, and A7sus4 chords, each with a corresponding guitar fretboard diagram and a musical staff showing the fingerpicking pattern.

D
xx0132

G5
3x004x

D/F#
2x034x

G5
3x004x

Em7
02004x

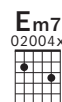
A7sus4
x0204x

The musical staff shows the fingerpicking patterns for the chords, with the bass line (left hand) and treble line (right hand) indicated. The patterns are: D (xx0132), G5 (3x004x), D/F# (2x034x), G5 (3x004x), Em7 (02004x), and A7sus4 (x0204x).

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♩ = 86



Oh, She - nan - do - ah, _____

{ I long to hear you.
I took a no - tion.
I left your daugh - ter.
I'm bound to leave you. }

A - way, you roll - ing

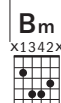


4 riv - er. _____

{ Oh, She - nan - do - ah,
To sail a - cross the
For I have crossed
Oh, She - nan - do - ah, }

{ I long to hear you.
storm - y o - cean.
the roll - ing wa - ter
I'll not de - ceive you. }

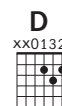
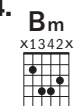
A -



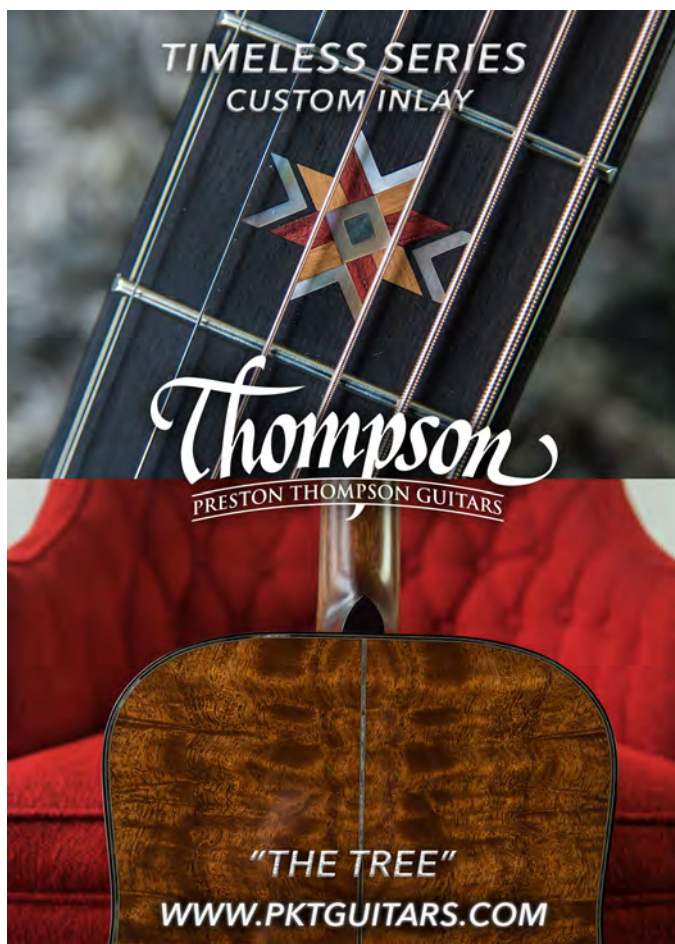
7 way, I'm bound a - way, _____ a - cross the wide _____ Mis - sou - ri. _____ Oh,

1.-3.

4.



11 _____ Mis - sou - ri, _____ a - cross the wide _____ Mis - sou - ri. _____



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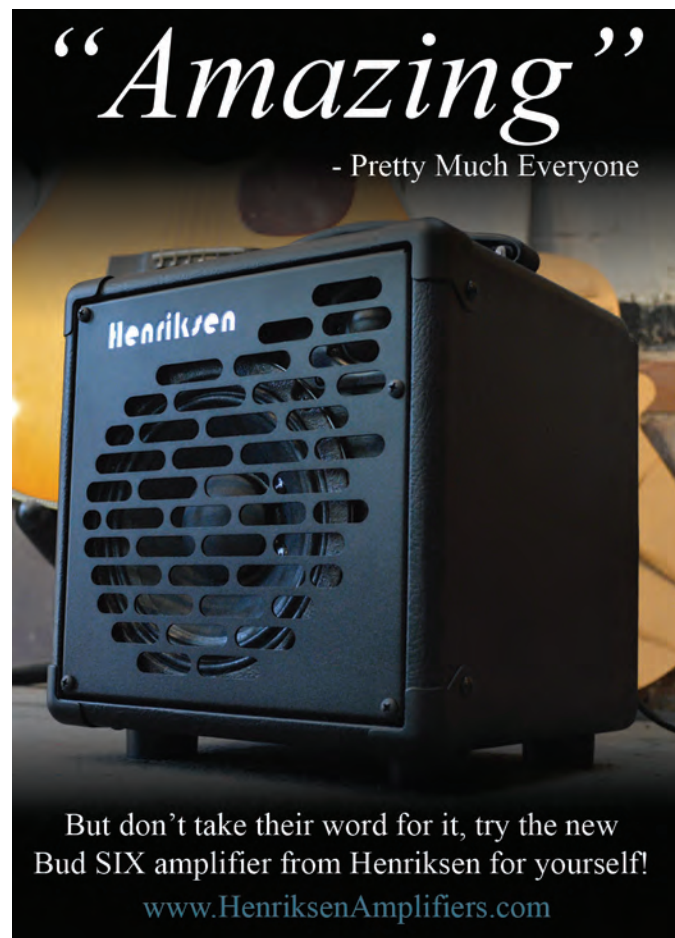
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By Danny Carnahan

Luis Uyaguari with sons Pablo (right) and Diego (left)



MAKERS & SHAKERS

GARY PARKS

South American Dispatch

A trek to the workshop of Ecuadorian master luthier Luis Uyaguari

BY GARY PARKS

Almost 50 years ago, master luthier Luis Uyaguari Quezada, then an adolescent, moved with his family to the metropolis of Cuenca, Ecuador, leaving behind the remote mountain village of San Bartolome. Their tiny pueblo had a generations-long tradition of guitar making, and Uyaguari's father was one of the village's best, yet he wanted to better his family's lot in life. So in the early 1970s, Julio Uyaguari Vintimilla established his new Cuenca workshop to build and repair instruments, with young Luis as his assistant.

"My father had heart problems, so as a youngster I did the planing and sawing," says Uyaguari. "I worked with him regularly from the age of 13, starting just before we left San Bartolome, and with my father's help built my first complete guitar at age 18." Alongside his father, the younger Uyaguari spent long hours working and learning his trade. By the time he was 26 he had become a skilled luthier in his

own right, so the elder Uyaguari encouraged him to enter an instrument into a guitar competition in the capital city of Quito." My guitar won first prize, and my father was very proud of me," he says, adding that his father died soon afterward, and he took the reins as the shop's master luthier.

Uyaguari, who is in his early 60s, estimates he has built about 1,500 guitars in his lifetime. His specialty is nylon-strings, though he has made some custom steel-strings and even seven-strings. One indication of his output is the stacks of soundhole cutouts on his shelves, each hand-labeled with the date and customer name. He's not sure when he began this record-keeping practice, but one shelf alone contains around 600 spruce and cedar disks.

MIXING TRADITION WITH INNOVATION

Upon entering Uyaguari's workshop, a striking realization is the lack of machine tools—power

saws, planers, routers, and the like. Instead, one sees a variety of handtools—chisels, planes, knives and files, vices, and wooden clamps—and a handmade device for bending sides, consisting of an electrically heated pipe placed between the edge of a workbench and a vertical wooden brace. Uyaguari says, "I learned the traditional method of guitar making from my father. The style of the instruments was influenced by the Spanish masters, since Ecuador was a colony of Spain for centuries. My principal tools are my hands—we don't have machines to help us build—and creativity, because I don't use standard molds for the guitars and make my own designs. And I put my heart into all of these instruments."

The joinery and fine details on Uyaguari's guitars are impeccable, and the luthier explains that key to this precision is keeping his tools very sharp. Prior to demonstrating how he prepares the tiny segments for rosettes, he goes

Uyaguari constructs a rosette by hand, a process that can take up to a week to complete.



DIEGO UYAGUARI

through a multistep process of sharpening and polishing a small knife to a surgical edge. His technique with that knife shows the fluidity and assurance born of a lifetime of daily practice. “Whenever I pick up a knife or chisel, I test and sharpen it so that it will cut smoothly and accurately. That way everything fits tightly,” he says.

Joints for the tops and backs are precisely hand-planed and glued, cut to shape, and carefully braced and tuned. Rosettes, whether basic or elaborate, are painstakingly assembled around the soundhole. When ready, the mostly carved neck is joined to the soundboard to await fitting and clamping the sides. Bending those sides is also an intensive, by-hand process, with moistened wood gradually shaped to the desired curvature with two hands over a hot pipe. And the process continues, through many steps of fitting, gluing and clamping, binding, sanding, and finishing. “We’re working on at least four instruments at a time, in different stages,” says Uyaguari. “But on average, I can complete a guitar in three months.”

THE ART OF LUTHERIE

For ornamentation, Uyaguari uses thinly sliced strips of naturally colored woods, veneers, and mother-of-pearl, which he stores in an armadillo

shell. The depth of Uyaguari’s artistry is apparent in the wide variety of rosettes, bindings, and multilayered strips on the backs and lower bout—each unique to the instrument. “This is the elegant part of the guitar where masters demonstrate their ability and talent, giving the instrument its personality,” the luthier says.

Once a customer has approved the custom design, Uyaguari begins assembling the rosette. Guidelines and outlines are lightly penciled on the soundboard, and he uses them to precisely hand-cut the hollows where the rosette will be assembled piece by piece. The chosen colors and thicknesses of woods are layered and glued to create the desired patterns. Uyaguari demonstrates the process by slicing off slightly angled bits of wood and putting them together in a pattern. “I use my small knife to cut the tiny pieces,” he explains. “It can take a full week just to make one of these rosettes.”

Uyaguari sources much of his wood from vendors in the United States and Spain, along with tuning machines and fretwire. Like most classical luthiers, he prefers to use European spruce tops and rosewood backs and sides for their textural and sonic characteristics. He says, “Depending on the customer, some will want the mellower sound of cedar. And I

occasionally use Ecuadorian teak and Peruvian walnut”—woods that look and sound good but are less costly—“for practice guitars.”

For necks, Uyaguari diverges from the standard mahogany or Spanish cedar, opting for Ecuadorian cedar, which he calls *mango* or *mastil*. “The texture of this wood is very different from mahogany; it has very special characteristics. Mango is very strong and not overly heavy, and is also a very pretty wood,” he says. Another deviation from tradition is his use of a strip of *chonta*, a very dense blackwood from an Amazonian palm, to strengthen the neck. It runs from midway up the headstock to the heel.

BUILDING FOR THE PLAYER

For Uyaguari, creating a guitar begins with knowing the player—the music they favor, the sound they’re looking for, their technique and approach to the instrument, their hand size and finger length and dexterity, and how they would like the guitar to look and feel. “I build and sell individual guitars, made for the customer,” he says. “We usually talk at least two or three hours about the design, the wood, and other details. It’s important to make a neck that is very comfortable for the player to use, and that fits their hands and style of playing.”

One of Uyaguari's basic concert instruments, with moderate ornamentation, starts at \$2,500. For guitars with complex rosettes, specialized binding, and other customized details, the pricing can run up to \$3,200. Though some Ecuadorians are wealthy, most earn only a modest income, and so it is difficult for local musicians to afford high-quality instruments. That's why most of Uyaguari's client base is outside of his country. "The people from countries like the U.S. and Europe value fine guitars and have the ability to pay for them," he explains. "The tourists come here to Cuenca and visit my workshop, like the instruments, and then order them. I don't export premade instruments to stores."

Just as Uyaguari's customers come from around the world, so too do his influences in terms of lutherie. Though he began his training in lutherie following local traditions, he has long been an avid student of master builders in North and South America, as well as Europe. He says, "I have learned from studying the best guitars of other makers. For example, in Mexico there are some very good luthiers. I have also

visited workshops in Spain, and I have some close colleagues in the United States."

In particular, he cites Massachusetts luthiers William Cumpiano and Alan Chapman, along with Gary Lee from New York. Uyaguari spent several months visiting them, and recalls, "I observed and took in all the details and quality of their work, and then put it into practice with

'My principal tools are my hands—we don't have machines to help us build!'

my own instruments." He also says he reads books by the great masters such as José Romanillos, who has written extensively about Antonio de Torres, and others, adding "I read, learn, and practice."

THE NEXT GENERATION

Like his father before him, Uyaguari is passing his love and skills in guitar making to his sons. Pablo Uyaguari has been apprenticing for over

seven years, and is now building beautiful guitars in his own right alongside his father. Diego Uyaguari uses his visual arts and design skills to realize highly creative and beautiful rosette and inlay patterns, along with his photography to document their process of lutherie, and his communication and customer savvy to continue the business. Seeing them together in the workshop, it's obvious that Luis respects his sons' ideas and quality of craftsmanship as he shows me a photo album of Diego's rosettes, and points to Pablo's most recent guitar in process. That respect and admiration is mutual.

After half a century of building, the elder Uyaguari has slowed his personal output of instruments. "Now, with the help of my sons, I personally build six or seven guitars a year. I don't have as much time to make new instruments." He says that he has taken on the role of master builder and teacher, as well as handling repairs and restoration. "I'm so happy that Pablo and Diego are following the family tradition, making beautiful Uyaguari guitars for a new generation." **AC**

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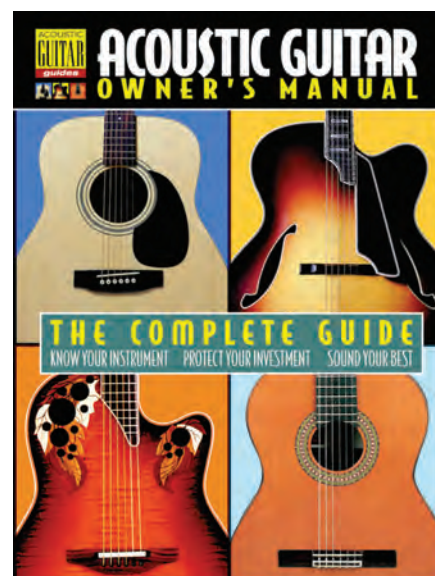


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Slotted Headstocks and Dead G Strings

Common mechanical and timbral problems solved

BY MARTIN KEITH

Q: *I've never had a slotted headstock guitar. Do they stay in tune as well as guitars with solid headstocks?*

—Jeff Fitzpatrick, Dexter, MO

A: Great question. It serves well to illustrate the universe of little details that can exist within an apparently simple feature such as the headstock shape. To begin, let's consider some of the more common headstock-end causes for tuning problems.

On the repair bench, I often encounter strings that are not wound evenly and neatly around the string posts. Frequently, this goes along with excessive amounts of string wound around the post, which can cause the string to pile up, cross over itself, and not wind tightly around the post. In these cases, residual slack can be stored in the windings, and can slowly settle over time, causing tuning instability. Regardless of tuner or headpiece type, the strings should be wound with each wrap nice and snug against the adjacent ones, without crossing windings, and no more than three or so wraps for wound strings, and maybe four or five for plain strings.

Due to the design of slotted headpieces, the posts are more difficult to reach and the strings are harder to control as they are brought up to tension, so I often see more of these kinds of winding issues with slotted headstocks. Although it's not the fault of the design itself, it takes a more careful approach to string correctly.



COURTESY OF COLLINGS GUITARS

Slotted headstocks typically have a steeper break angle beyond the nut. This results in greater downward pressure on the nut itself. On occasion, particularly with softer nut materials, this pressure can cause wound strings to grab and dig into the nut material and bind up. When this happens, the strings cannot travel freely through the nut as you tighten or loosen the tuners—another very common cause for tuning issues.

At the design level, tuners for slotted headstocks have a challenge to overcome. They cannot easily be installed in bushings (the small metal cylinders that support the string post on solid pegheads). Instead, most slotted tuners simply live in holes drilled in the wood itself. These holes can sometimes get filled in with stray lacquer during finishing, or have rough interiors left behind after drilling, both of which can cause added friction and interference. Furthermore, because slotted-head string posts go through a pair of holes instead of just one, there is twice the potential for such fitting and friction problems. Careful luthiers who build slotted headstocks generally take extra time to refit and detail these

holes, and some even install low-friction bushings around the posts, but many guitars are not lucky enough to get that attention.

Finally—tuners themselves have come a long way over the years. Slotted headstocks are often associated with vintage guitars, and many of those instruments come from eras when the materials, machining tolerances, and overall quality of tuners was substantially lower than today's. Fortunately, some companies now offer tuners designed to fit vintage instruments both mechanically and visually, but with the well-cut gears and close-fitting parts that mark modern quality tuners. If carefully installed, these can make a sizeable difference in tuning accuracy and stability.

Q: *I have played the classical guitar for quite a number of years and when trying to buy a new guitar, I'm invariably disappointed by a common problem. Why do so many guitars suffer from a dead G string? Is there anything I can do to avoid the situation or is it a build problem?*

—Keith Morris, via email

GOT A QUESTION?

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Martin Keith



If AG selects your question for publication, you'll receive a complimentary copy of AG's *Acoustic Guitar Owner's Manual*.

A: Ah, the G string. Obvious jokes aside, the G is easily the most problematic string on nearly every platform of guitar—classical, steel-string, or electric. One of the biggest challenges in designing a successful set of strings is maintaining an evenness and consistency of timbre and tone across the range. On classical guitars, where the repertoire often involves maintaining subtle tonal nuances while shifting between different playing positions, this becomes particularly important.

Keeping consistent tone between wound basses and plain trebles is a particularly challenging task for string designers, as the stranded core and metal wraps of bass strings are very different from the homogeneous composition of nylon trebles. Unfortunately for us, these differences tend to be most audible when the strings are particularly thin or thick.

As any material gets thicker, it gets more rigid/stiff. This stiffness interferes with the free vibration of the string, adding odd harmonics and reducing sustain. As the thickest plain string on the guitar, the G exhibits the greatest degree of these characteristics. A thinner G would likely

sound more lively, but would also have lower tension, which would in turn make it sound and feel out of place with its neighbors.

To compound this, the tonal character of wound strings also varies with their thickness, and the side-by-side arrangement of the D and G can sometimes make the limitations of each more glaring by comparison.

Many classical players, both guitar and violin-family, choose strings not by the set but for each individual position, and I have known violinists who used a different brand for each of the four strings on their instrument. To be sure, string companies put great effort into designing well-matched sets. But nonetheless, it may be worth trying to mix and match to optimize your chosen set for your touch and your particular instrument. Fluorocarbon trebles are brighter and livelier than plain nylon, for example, and so your results may improve by using a carbon G mixed in with warmer, rounder nylon B and E strings.

Another thought: Since classical guitars are more lightly built than their steel-string counterparts, they can be more prone to the opening-up process that occurs during an instrument's early life. The midrange of a guitar can often evolve

quite dramatically in the first year or two after it is built. If your experience has been primarily with new instruments, it may be worth seeking out one that has already been played for at least a few years, to see if the more mature instrument has the characteristics you seek.

Finally, if you consider moving forward with a more expensive handmade guitar, I encourage you to play as many as possible, keeping an ear open for their performance in this area. Take notes of the makers, the wood choices, scale lengths, and the strings on each one, and keep track of which combinations most closely accomplish the tonal results you are seeking. If you commission a guitar from a luthier, be sure to mention this as a priority, and discuss how best to get a lively G on your custom instrument. I've been lucky enough to play a few classical guitars with unparalleled evenness and clarity in every range and position, and they are quite a joy to experience.

Martin Keith is a luthier, repair and restoration expert, and working musician based in Woodstock, New York. martinkeithguitars.com

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Martin SC-13E

A bold new offering from the legacy maker

BY JAMES ROTONDI

C.F. Martin & Company has certainly modernized its time-honored approach to guitar form factor and design over the last few decades, but the iconic Nazareth, Pennsylvania, brand has been poised—some might say overdue—to make a truly transformative statement with a radical new instrument. Martin has most decidedly done so with the unique, highly playable, versatile, and affordable new SC-13E, which boasts the kind of fresh, out-of-the-box redesign—even flying in the face of Martin's usual insistence on a traditional glued dovetail joint—that will no doubt leave some old-school purists scowling, while getting many Martin newbies talking.

LET ME HEAR YOUR BODY TALK

In terms of size, the dimensions of the SC-13E, with its unique offset S-shape cutaway body style, are akin to a gently stretched OM. The beautifully grained, gloss-finished top is solid Sitka spruce, with back and sides made of a mahogany core topped with a stunning koa veneer. The iris-style rosette, which evokes the aperture of an antique camera, features a contrast of celestial blue acrylic and a white acrylic pearl-like inlay, as does the bullseye motif at the 12th fret.

The cutaway, looking less like a traditional horn than a chin, drops away and slightly back from the neck at the 17th fret. Compensating for the lost resonant space is an enlarged lower bout—which calls to mind the offset shapes of Rick Turner's Renaissance models and even the iconic Fender Jazzmaster. In theory, the offset is meant to increase the guitar's headroom, by reducing some of the woofy low-mids typical of, say, a full-sized dreadnought.

The ebony sloped modern belly bridge has been redesigned for the SC-13E, with the edges softened and the size scaled back, making it a more natural base for palm-muting and other electric-guitar-inspired techniques. White binding, double-lined purfling, and a modified teardrop tortoise-pattern scratchplate round out the attractive top, which uses asymmetrical X-bracing with treble side scalloping; heck, there's even an unscalloped X-brace on the inner side of the SC-13E's back, visible through the soundhole, and



Martin
SC-13E



criss-crossing a new-era Martin nameplate that suggests the label on a classic vinyl LP. If you've forgotten who invented X-bracing, the SC-13E serves as a stylish reminder.

NO PAIN IN THE NECK

As striking as the offset Sitka top may be, it's the SC-13E's innovative new dovetail/bolt hybrid neck joint that is sure to garner the most attention—and perhaps controversy. Let's start with the Low Profile Velocity neck itself, which players accustomed to a modern C-shaped profile on, say, a Strat or Tele, or the Vintage Deluxe necks on Martin's own Modern Deluxe Series, will find remarkably familiar, and similarly comfortable, though with notable differences.

The neck is, by all appearances at least, a bolt-on style (more about that in a minute), so it never broadens out at the body into a conventional heel. With the heel removed, Martin has even sculpted the neck joint to remove excess bulk where the neck joins the body, so your fretting hand moves freely up past the 12th fret to where the upper bout meets the neck at the—wait for it—13th fret, rather than the traditional 12th or 14th frets. This means your thumb and fingers can be in a naturally aligned grip position for scales and chords at even the 13th fret, and your thumb can be reasonably anchored for moves and lead figures right up to the 20th fret.

With the structural innovations of the SC-13E, your Martin's setup can actually evolve as your playing style does.

Martin's high-performance neck taper affords a bit of extra meat on the treble side in the cowboy-chord zone, gradually reverse-tapering to a more slender treble side and chunkier bass side starting at around the tenth fret. Players accustomed to electric guitar, or who simply want more ease for lead figures higher up the neck—and more support for those higher-range chords—are going to be pleased. Made of satin-finished select hardwood—often sipo, a tone-wood similar to African mahogany—with an ebony fretboard, the neck is roomy and relatively flat: a 12-inch radius and a 1-3/4-inch string spacing at the nut (2-1/8-inch at the 12th fret) make for a generous feel for electric players, as well as acoustic fingerpickers. Indeed, the SC-13E affords plenty of fretboard room for larger hands, easy rest-stroke facility, and a velvety bass response over the soundhole.

Describing the neck joint, Martin's gifted young design manager, Rameen Shayegan, explains, "The Sure Align system combines elements of a traditional dovetail with the ease of adjustment that previously would only be possible with a bolt-on neck. Essentially, the neck slides onto a dovetail in the neck pocket, which allows the leading edge of the neck to sit on an elevation plate. You get all the surface area contact and tonal transference of a dovetail, while allowing an authorized service tech to adjust the neck angle quickly and easily." Martin also integrated a simple set-screw method for tweaking the overall scale length for intonation micro-adjustments, as well as a removable, interchangeable shim insert that allows for easy neck-angle adjustment. Both appear at the soundhole end of the neck, along with a simple truss rod cavity that requires a 4mm Allen wrench.

CLASSIC MARTIN TONE

In a purely acoustic setting, the SC-13E offers a surprising amount of volume for its size, and, especially when strummed or plucked over the soundhole or upper reaches of the neck, an excellent overall projection balance string to string, with a rounded, compact bottom-end, detailed and bronze-y highs, and the warm, woody, coppery quality one associates with, well, a Martin.

I was likewise very pleased by the level of detail and string dynamics the Fishman MXT onboard pickup system delivers. The tone control (essentially more of a mid-scoop dial) is effective both for feedback control and tone-shaping. I ran the SC-13E direct into a Fender Acoustasonic Junior amp, as well as a Fender 1965 Deluxe Reissue, and the mid- and high-end detail was stunning; I even felt compelled to dial the amp's treble and mids down to under 3. With a dash of digital plate or analog spring reverb, the overall sound was open, punchy, detailed, and even somewhat sweet.

Plugged direct into my Universal Audio Apollo Twin interface, I did detect a hint of that telltale piezo quack when recording the Fishman MXT to my DAW, but it was hardly a deal-breaker. Even better, the SC-13E recorded very nicely when miked with a Rode NT1-A large diaphragm, which translated the guitar's tight midrange structure, bronze-y top and woody ambience really well, with very little extra EQ required. In fact, it would be fair to say the miked SC-13E sounded downright *expensive*.

THE TAKEAWAY

The SC-13E certainly diverges significantly from traditional Martin design—it's both a risky

and a necessary step for the American guitar giant. That said, it's unlikely you'll pick up the SC-13E and feel you're playing something brainy and futuristic. Instead, close your eyes and simply move your hand up the satiny, slim, tapered neck and around the neck joint, and the effect isn't techy or novel, but organic. Like the broad string spacing and balanced, detailed acoustic and electric tones of this very un-Martin-y Martin, there's a blend of tried-and-true Martin values and an added technical empowerment that comes with its ability to be fine-tuned around each player's individual needs. With the structural innovations of the SC-13E, your Martin's setup can actually evolve as your playing style does. You evolve; Martin evolves. Not a bad deal, I'd say. **AG**



SPECS

BODY Asymmetric with 13th-fret neck junction and cutaway; solid Sitka spruce top with Tone Tension X brace; koa fine veneer back and sides; ebony bridge with compensated Tusq saddle (2-1/4" string spacing); brown tortoise pattern pickguard; gloss finish on top and satin finish on back and side

NECK Select hardwood neck; ebony fretboard; 25-2/5" scale length; 1-3/4" Corian nut; nickel open gear tuners; satin finish

OTHER Martin Authentic Acoustic Light strings (.012–054); soft case

MADE IN Mexico

PRICE \$1,499 street

martinguitar.com

Collings 001 14-Fret

The latest body style from the Austin, Texas, maker delights on all levels

BY GREG OLWELL

Even weeks after receiving the freshly built Collings 001 14-Fret, its dueling scents of wood and nitrocellulose lacquer continue to delight as they waft around my house, causing me to pause wistfully from time to time to notice, “Oh, something smells nice,” before realizing that the guitar on the stand sitting next to me on the couch is the source of my olfactory happiness. Because I find guitars to be useful most any place, I’ve never been wild about the term “couch guitar.” But here is the Collings 001 14-Fret right by my sofa, waiting to be played in those rare moments when it’s not already in my hands.

The 001 14-Fret is Collings’ latest body style and, as the name indicates, is a 14-fret version of the 12-fret 00. It’s been seeing a lot of play time, not just because a shelter-in-place order means I’m housebound with my family, but because this is an extraordinarily well-made, excellent-playing guitar that seems able to uplift even the most basic fingerpicker—such as myself—and would clearly suit any player seeking well-rounded tone in a compact instrument.

SURPRISING VOLUME AND BALANCE

Like all Collings guitars, the 001 14-fret is available in both standard and traditional packages, with a range of tonewood options. At \$4,300, the entry price for the basic spruce-and-mahogany model (as reviewed) might be significant compared to the new and vintage 00-18-style guitars that inspired it. But that cost opens a door to an instrument built by a maker that has for decades been celebrated for making no compromises in materials, construction, setup, or tone.



Collings
001 14-Fret



With this new shape, inspired by the Martin 14-fret 00 with a 14-1/2-inch lower bout that first appeared in 1934, Collings aims to merge a warmer low midrange presence than is typical of a smaller body with the volume of a larger body, all in a very comfortable package. My time with the instrument confirms that Collings nailed this goal, but I'd add that the tone is remarkably balanced to my ears and feels very evenly spread between the lows, highs, and mids. It's like a flat EQ on a quality preamp—just pure goodness that gives you room for expressive playing.

However surprising this grand concert guitar's volume capability is—and it will be for those folks weaned on larger instruments—the 001 14-Fret did get a little lost with an upright bass and vocals on an acoustic gig at a busy restaurant in San Francisco. That said, a bandmate used it for part of the set, and it was a treat to be on the receiving end of the guitar while he played his favorite Mississippi John Hurt songs. It sure makes gratifying sounds while in the driver's seat, but all of the 001's good qualities shine even brighter from the audience's perspective: Think warm midrange, thick and present bass, and a clear high-end that is excellent for strumming chords, playing single-note lines, and fingerpicking ragtime and open-tuned blues.

The shorter 24-7/8-inch scale also makes for easy bends and chording. I compared the 001 14-Fret to my similarly proportioned Waterloo WL-S, and while the ladder-braced Waterloo has a little more punch for uptempo chord comping, the Collings, with its scalloped prewar-style X-bracing, offers more detailed high-end dazzle and low-end thump.

SUPERLATIVE FIT AND FINISH

I would be remiss not to mention the materials and construction, the fit and finish. As you would expect from a guitar in this price range, everything is exceptional from stem to stern. The Sitka spruce top has very tight grain and a tremendous amount of silking (medullary rays), something that folks will wax on about as a sign of quality, which gives the wood a captivating 3-D quality. The naturally dark ebony used for the bridge, headplate, and fingerboard is appealing and

It's like a flat EQ on a quality preamp—just pure goodness that gives you room for expressive playing.

serves to highlight the wood's grain variations. The neck has a slight V profile that gets a little sharper toward the higher regions, and it's a real comfortable place for a fretting hand to navigate.

If you're looking for a comfortable guitar that you can spend hours playing, and you are open to the surprising versatility and well-rounded tone of a 00, the Collings 001 14-Fret is well worth a test drive. It delivers irrefutably excellent materials and construction in a guitar that will never fail to impress in tone, looks, and feel.

SPECS

BODY Sitka spruce top with prewar-style scalloped X-bracing; Honduran mahogany back and sides; tortoise binding with four-layer purfling; 1-style walnut back strip; tortoise pickguard; high-gloss nitrocellulose finish

NECK 24-7/8"-scale mahogany neck with modified V profile and adjustable truss rod; ebony fingerboard with mother-of-pearl position markers; 20 nickel-silver frets, 1-11/16" nut width; nickel Waverly 16:1 tuners; ebony peghead overlay with mother-of-pearl Collings logo; high-gloss polyester resin finish

OTHER Ebony belly-style bridge with bone drop-in saddle and 2-3/16" spacing; ebony bridge pins and endpin; D'Addario EJ16 strings (.012-.053), TKL hardshell case; limited lifetime warranty

MADE IN USA

PRICE \$4,300 street

collingsguitars.com

AG





Orange Crush Acoustic 30

Smart and colorful little combo from the English amplifier company

BY MATT BLACKETT

Kind of like an onomatopoeia sounds like what it means, Orange amps have always looked like what they're called, and how cool is that? And whereas many Orange designs have been associated with super heavy music of late, the fact is you can play just about any style of music through them and they sound great. Orange is reiterating that point in a big—and little—way with the Orange Crush Acoustic 30, only its second foray into the acoustic amp world, which can run on ten AA batteries, so you can crank it up literally anywhere.

Sticking to the cosmetics for a moment, this amp looks great and is totally in keeping with the company's history: orange Tolex, a tweed grille cloth, and that awesome coat-of-arms insignia. (If the orange is too loud for you, the amp is also available with a black Tolex covering.)

The Crush Acoustic 30 is a tiny little amp that weighs almost nothing. The specs claim it's 13.5 pounds, but I don't believe that. It comes right out of the box with a tilt-back design, so all the sound is projecting upward, where you want it. A look at the control panel shows the hieroglyphics-in-lieu-of-knob-names that Orange is famous for. It's a little confusing at first, but you get used to it pretty quickly. There are two channels: one for guitar and one for a mic or an additional instrument. Both channels have gain and EQ, and Channel 1 also provides a semi-parametric midrange control.

NICELY VOICED

I plugged my trusty Larrivée into Channel 1 and set the EQ to noon, with no cut or boost to the mids. Given the diminutive dimensions of the Crush, you can't really expect it to sound huge, and it doesn't. The sound is focused, and because of the ingenious tilt-back design, it really hits you. Nudging the bass and treble knobs up provided a powerful tonal shift—both controls have a lot of range.

The Colour switch also boosts lows and highs, while dipping mids slightly, and it can get you in trouble if you've already cranked the EQ



knobs. It is voiced nicely though, and sounds great at lower bass and treble settings, with a brilliant top-end sheen. The semi-parametric midrange section gives you control over frequency and cut/boost level and is capable of subtle or drastic modifications to your tone. You can also use it to notch out problematic feedback-inducing frequencies, and I was able to employ it pretty effectively for that purpose.

SUBTLE AND MUSICAL

You can put reverb or chorus—but only one at a time—on either channel or both. I was disappointed that I had to choose between the two effects, but they both sound sweet. The reverb does what you want, providing depth and space; the slow chorus is subtle and musical, and the faster settings do a cool faux-Leslie thing. In fact, slathering that effect on the mic channel let me add a cool, Beatles-esque vocal to an unaffected acoustic guitar—a neat trick to have up your sleeve.

The obvious question with a small, lightweight amp such as this is, “Can I gig with it?” I will give that a qualified yes, but it depends on the situation. Orange amps are known for being loud, but 30 watts can only do so much when it comes to amplifying an acoustic guitar and a voice, not to mention low-end-hogging backing tracks that you can play through the 3.5mm aux in. I could see this amp handling a quiet coffeehouse or living room gig, but it strikes me as underpowered for busking on a noisy street corner, although the battery

operation makes it a great candidate for doing exactly that. The Crush Acoustic 30 could be a great personal monitor on a large gig, utilizing the XLR DI out to feed the house PA. It's a smart-looking little sound system with effects. It can't do everything, but it's a useful tool that a savvy acoustic guitarist will be able to use in a variety of ways.

AG

SPECS

AMP Two-channel, 30 watts; one combo XLR/1/4" input; one 1/4" input; 3.5mm stereo in; 1/4" l/r stereo in; XLR DI out; 1/4" line out; effects send and return; Channel 1: Pad and Colour switches; bass, midrange, treble, and gain controls; Channel 2: phantom power and mic/line switches; bass, treble, and gain controls

SPEAKERS One 8" Voice of the World

OTHER Reverb and chorus select knob with channel blend control; semiparametric Mid control; 12.75" W x 9" D x 1" H; 13.5 lbs.

MADE IN UK

PRICE \$399 street

orangeamps.com

Curtis Novak Magnetic Soundhole Pickups

Vintage-inspired designs offer a decidedly different sound

BY NICK MILLEVOI

The sound of a magnetic pickup on a steel-string guitar can be a unique thing. Just listen to old recordings of Lightnin' Hopkins to hear the way his DeArmond soundhole pickup helped provide a sound world not possible with a straight acoustic or electric guitar, mixing the woodiness and warmth of an acoustic with the grittiness of an overdriven tube amp.

Pickup wizard Curtis Novak recently launched a new line of magnetic soundhole designs that deliver a wide range of vintage-style tones. These pickups are available in three models—the single-coil G-coil and D-coil, as well as a humbucker—with a variety of mounting options. From various gold-foil styles (\$225) to a more low-key slimline design (\$195)—all of which can be enclosed in materials like ebony, maple, rosewood, ivoroid, or

tortoiseshell—these are handsome pickups that make a striking impression.

I was taken by the gold-foil D-coil before I even tried it. The pickup's retro diamond design and ivoroid mount added just the right flair to my Iris OG. I easily demoed the pickup on my guitar using Novak's suggested adhesive for short-term use, though it can be installed permanently using the included brackets and installing an input jack.

Sure enough, I plugged into my 1949 Fender Deluxe and it instantly sang. The D-coil offered a warm, compressed tone that easily pushed my amp into overdrive, with controllable feedback at a low volume. The optional volume and tone control unit (\$50) made it easy to dial things back, but I found myself keeping everything turned up for maximum effect. With this setup,



I felt transported back in time, and bluesy riffage flowed out naturally. That feeling wasn't lost when I tried other amps, including a couple of silverface Fenders and an old Ampeg Mercury.

The G-coil has a similar sound, but with a more subtle and dimensional tone that feels more obviously acoustic while retaining the electric warmth of the D-coil. Whatever the choice, Novak's new line definitely fills a much-needed niche in high-end acoustic guitar pickups, offering well-crafted models that provide tonal options outside of typical acoustic-electric sounds.

curtisnovak.com

D'Addario Casein Picks

A fine alternative to tortoiseshell

BY NICK ROSSI

The tortoiseshell trade spanned centuries before it was halted in 1973, when the hawksbill sea turtle became classified as an endangered species. Among the industries affected was the instrument world, which had used this material, highly valued for its clarity and timbre, in plectrums. After the ban, celluloid picks replaced tortoiseshell, even as the sound differed significantly. But over the past couple of decades, boutique makers have been experimenting with casein, a protein-based plastic touted as the closest material to shell.

D'Addario is the first major manufacturer to offer casein plectrums. At the 2020 Winter NAMM show, the company introduced a heavy 2.00mm 351-shape guitar pick (\$21.99 street) and a 1.40mm rounded triangle Chris Thile Signature mandolin pick (\$24.99). Both share similar features—a faux-tortoiseshell appearance, beveled edges, and embossing to

provide grip—with prices lower than their typical boutique counterparts.

Using the picks on vintage archtop guitars equipped with different string types, as well as on an Eastman mandolin, I found similarly satisfying results across the board. The fabled clarity of true tortoiseshell was present and the timbre was certainly pleasing, if not mellow-sounding, relative to a heavier celluloid pick. Brash 80/20 bronze strings were easy to control with the guitar pick. Likewise, the shrill tendency of the mandolin was easily tamed by the casein, without detracting from the articulation required of a solo voice.

While the hefty gauge of the mandolin plectrum may appeal to a fairly broad range of pickers, the guitar pick is thicker than many guitarists, save for Gypsy-jazz musicians, are likely used to; players accustomed to thinner celluloid picks might find the transition a bit



challenging. Considering the quality and how nice the picks sound, hopefully D'Addario will soon extend the range to include other sizes and shapes, to suit plectrists of all stripes.

daddario.com

James Taylor *American Standard* (Concord)

PLAYLIST

JAMES TAYLOR *American Standard*

Living on Standard Time

James Taylor takes a nostalgic turn with the *American Songbook*

BY GREG CAHILL

In turbulent times, the mellow tones of James Taylor are a soothing balm. On *American Standard*, the popular singer, songwriter, and guitarist teams up with ace jazz guitarist John Pizzarelli to explore the Great American Songbook, including the rich repertoire found in such vintage musical theater hits as the 1940s Broadway blockbusters *Oklahoma* and *Show Boat*, among others. These are beautiful, melodic songs that get stuck in your head, while lyrically evoking dreamlike worlds filled with romance and wonder and whimsy.

The album, overall, is a collection of guitar pieces recorded in Nashville and featuring small combos composed of an assortment of musicians with whom Taylor has performed over the years in the studio and on the road. Additional guests include dobro great Jerry Douglas, fiddler Stuart Duncan, and upright bassist Viktor Krauss. The songs perfectly complement Taylor's own introspective songwriting (none of which is featured on this album)—at times playful but always sentimental.

Taylor sets the tone with the opener, "My Blue Heaven," a jaunty rendition of Walter Donaldson and George A. Whiting's intoxicating homage to

marital bliss, first heard on Broadway in the 1927 *Ziegfeld Follies* revue. The lyrics capture the care-free abandon of the Jazz Age two years before the world slid into the Great Depression. The arrangement is sparse, Taylor's vocals are characteristically smooth, the mood is breezy.

Of course, Taylor is no stranger to other people's songs. One of his biggest hits, "You've Got a Friend," was composed by his longtime associate Carole King, and in 2008, Taylor released his first album of covers, appropriately titled *Covers*, which leaned heavily on country and rockabilly. In a recent interview, Taylor said he was "interested in doing something new, bringing something new" to these standards. The middle-of-the-road arrangements aren't especially innovative, but the combination of Taylor's melodic readings and calming vocals, coupled with Pizzarelli's tasteful rhythmic comping, has a decidedly palliative effect.

Indeed, with a high-caliber jazz cat like Pizzarelli on board, you know there's going to be instrumental magic, albeit subtle. You hear it on Taylor's dreamy take on "Moon River," composed by Henry Mancini and Johnny Mercer, and first performed by Audrey Hepburn, accompanying

herself on acoustic guitar, in the 1961 film *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. Taylor gently embraces the vocal melody, while he and Pizzarelli softly strum and fingerpick their guitars; the solo is played on a chromatic harmonica. It's a simple and effective formula repeated throughout *American Standard*. You hear it over and again: The 1947 Lerner and Loewe classic "Almost Like Being in Love" strolls lazily as a short sax solo plays over a bed of lush acoustic guitar chords; and it's easy to imagine Taylor picking his cedar-top Olson and contemplating life on the grassy banks of the Mississippi as he plays the *Show Boat* classic "Ol' Man River," which trails off with a short whistling refrain.

Not all of these songs are associated with film or stage, however—the obscure "Easy as Rollin' Off a Log" comes from a 1938 Merry Melodies cartoon called "Katnip Kollege," and "Teach Me Tonight," co-written in 1953 by Gene De Paul and Sammy Cahn, is a jazz standard that has been covered by everybody from Count Basie to Al Jarreau and Phoebe Snow to Frank Sinatra. The popular love ballad fits so comfortably into Taylor's wheelhouse that you might assume he'd composed it. But then, isn't that the point of a good cover? **AC**



Laurence Juber

The Fab 4th

(Hologram)

LI's takes on The Beatles never get old

This is Laurence Juber's fourth Beatles album; in all he's cut 59 songs, and it's not *just* the hits. You gotta love a guy who will take on tunes like "I Am the Walrus," "And Your Bird Can Sing," "Strawberry Fields," and "A Day in the Life," and do so many unimaginably cool things with the arrangements.

"A Day in the Life" is his most impressive feat of legerdemain on *The Fab 4th*: Juber manages to capture the song's different parts and tempo shifts—including McCartney's "bridge" ("Woke up, got out of bed...") and the orchestral crescendos—on his six-string, with no loss of the song's power. The same is true of the rhythmically challenging "You Never Give Me Your Money." Juber's arrangements in general are always spot-on, deftly mixing no-wasted-notes economy with amazing virtuosity. This is particularly evident on the simpler tunes, where Juber always seems to find interesting parts based on some harmony, whether vocal or instrumental, in the original. And he *really* knows how to capture the all-important bass in so many of these tunes.

This album contains a few tracks I'd call B-list Beatles—"Tell Me What You See," "Every Little Thing," "I'll Be Back"—but there are so many standouts, including "Across the Universe," "Lady Madonna" (love the Fats Domino-ish rolling bass figure), "If I Fell," "I Will" (see transcription on page 94), and a rollicking "Back in the USSR," that this album is once again required listening for all Beatles-loving guitar fanatics! —Blair Jackson



Steve Hicks

Rule of Thumb

(Acoustic Music)

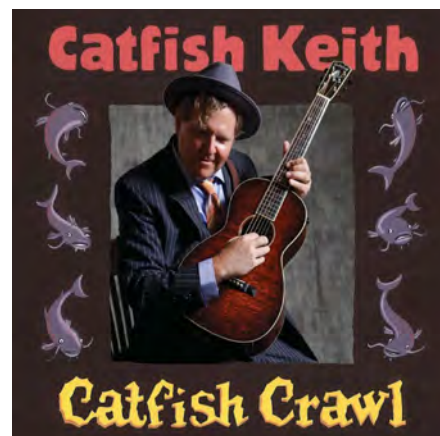
Old tunes enlivened by fingerpicking mastery

As the title of Steve Hicks' *Rule of Thumb* indicates, the British fingerstylist's solo showcase of old-time music is tied together by his alternating bass thumb technique—the tunes are "ruled by thumb." The metronomic pulse and buzzing drone engendered by Hicks' technique also complements his open tunings, which give each piece complex resonating overtones.

Hicks' playing is particularly suited to his selection of turn-of-the-20th-century rags and dance tunes. On "Hyacinth Rag," the primary melody emerges almost imperceptibly from a deft weave of exploratory countermelodies and ping-ponging rhythms. Similarly, the syncopated one-step "From Soup to Nuts" slips indistinguishably from strummed Baroque flourishes to cartwheeling ragtime.

Elsewhere, Hicks' picking spirals upwards in 3/4 time on "Three Quarter Blues," a lilting, little-known Gershwin ballad boasting atonal highlights. "East Tennessee Blues" transposes a scampering fiddle tune to guitar. As crab-walking melody lines coalesce in a tangle of picking, Hicks takes an abrupt bent-note detour into an original blues in the style of Lonnie Johnson. "Down by the Sally Gardens," a DADGAD arrangement of an Irish low-whistle tune, entwines virtuosic picking with nostalgic atmosphere.

In contrast, Hicks adopts a straightforward approach on a pair of Stephen Foster tunes, "Massa's in de Cold Ground" and "Hard Times Come Again No More," bringing this lively selection of revitalized rags, reels, blues, and fiddle tunes to a graceful and stately close. —Pat Moran



Catfish Keith

Catfish Crawl

(Fish Tail)

Bringing the past to life with spirit and chops

There's nobody who can snap a string quite like Catfish Keith. When he snaps it hard, say on Bo Carter's "Banana in Your Fruit Basket," the note just keeps sounding, hanging in mid-air like a punchline waiting for the audience to catch up. He's a master of snaps, crackles, and pops, every one of them aimed at a knowing smile, punctuating some line about bananas, catfish, yo-yos, or the best jelly in the neighborhood.

It's all there on *Catfish Crawl*, his 18th album, and whether he's singing a song that's half-joking or half-serious, he's happy to push his guitar collection as far as it'll go, from ARK to Fairbanks, National, Ralph Brown, and the Santa Cruz Guitar Company. "Bella Mina," first recorded by Alan Lomax in Nassau, is practically giddy with the story of a rum-running ship that's painted black to avoid detection. "Dixie Darlin'," a Carter Family chestnut, gets a double-time alternating bass that keeps Catfish focused on all the booze he's going to drink and all girls he's going to squeeze.

Best of all, there's "By the Waters of the Minnetonka," a Nelson Eddy hit covered in 1933 by Jim & Bob—the Genial Hawaiians—with Keith tackling both lead acoustic guitar (Jim) and lead slide guitar (Bob). It's got a hearty country bass on the bottom strings, some sweet Hawaiian chimes on the upper strings, a steady driving rhythm in the middle, and more party fun than seems possible with just five picking fingers and an acoustic guitar. —Kenny Berkowitz



**Doc Watson
and Gaither Carlton**
Doc Watson and Gaither Carlton
(Smithsonian Folkways)

Rare early tapes show both genius and potential

Doc Watson helped transform acoustic guitar from rhythm to lead instrument with a self-taught two-finger technique. Recorded live at a New York folk club in 1962, *Doc Watson and Gaither Carlton* captures an early example of Watson's innovative approach, which utilizes a thumbpick for alternating bass and an index fingerpick for melodic and rhythmic runs on the treble strings.

Watson had played New York a year before as part of Clarence Ashley's band, but on that recording he gets a bit lost in the ensemble. Here, Watson stretches out, accompanied by his father-in-law, fiddler Gaither Carlton. With Carlton on whirling Appalachian fiddle, Watson alternates between guitar and banjo on this set. The one outlier is a rendition of the country blues "Groundhog," where Watson's see-saw strumming and rapid-fire picking surge in tandem with Carlton's percolating banjo.

Watson dampens his guitar's bass strings for a deep, thumping pulse to anchor his fingerpicked melody on the traditional fiddle tune "Billy in the Low Ground." On the rollicking "Blue Ridge Mountain Blues," his cantering buckboard bass notes lope in tandem with cascading high-end fills and Carlton's spiraling fiddle. And on "The Dream of the Miner's Child," Watson's warm drawl depicts a premonition of death, swept along by rattling rhythms and corkscrewing fiddle.

But it's the instrumentals that are even more immediate. Both "Double Fire" and "Bonaparte's Retreat" ensnare Watson's bounding rhythms and resonant fills in Carlton's skirling bowing, marking this collection as another kind of premonition—a foretaste of greatness to come.

—PM



Hiroya Tsukamoto
Window to the World
(Hiroya Tsukamoto Music)

Brilliant fingerpicking on a Martin, plus looping pedals

Hiroya Tsukamoto is a phenomenal talent, a Japanese fingerpicker, composer, and Berklee College alum who was also second-place winner at the 2018 International Finger Style Guitar Championship. Now based in New York City, 18 years after leaving Kyoto, he's on the road virtually every weekend, playing solo with just a Martin OM-42 and a set of looping pedals.

Window to the World catches Tsukamoto at one of those many performances, a 2019 live-in-the-studio gig in Brunswick, Maine. The Martin sounds crisp, the room feels warmly intimate, and the fingerpicking is delicate, fluid, and beautifully detailed. Two folk songs, the Okinawan "Asadoyayunta" and the Scottish "Water is Wide," show the comforting breathiness of his voice and the outer edges of his guitar playing: staccato and lyrical, precise and passionate, solo and layered. The rest of the pieces are travelogues filled with sumptuous arpeggios and soaring improvisations, impressionist landscapes of canyons, coastlines, and mountains that recall the sweetest, gentlest memories of the places he's been and the people he's met.

In the longest song, the expansive 11-minute "Storytelling," Tsukamoto shares an unexpected encounter with a Buddhist monk in the hills of Tennessee, singing his story in both Japanese and English to encompass the miles he's covered since moving to the States. "I've been traveling along from the east to the west," he sings in a mantra of journey and discovery, a quiet nod to the poet Basho. "I've been traveling along to find myself, to find my way."

—KB



Greg Diamond
Musings and Origins
(Chasm Records)

Solo Afro-Cuban jazz, expertly rendered on an orchestra model

As he worked on a cross-promotional project with Collings Guitars several years ago, the jazz guitarist and composer Greg Diamond, who was accustomed to playing electric arch-tops, became enchanted by the balance and sonority inherent to acoustic orchestra models. This led to a solo acoustic project, *Musings and Origins*, Diamond's fourth album, a collection of originals he composed between 2002 and 2016. While the album is available in the usual audio formats, Diamond also filmed the sessions in the recording studio, and some of the clips can be found on his YouTube page.

Diamond, a New York native, recently received his DMA in instrumental jazz performance from the University of Miami, where he researched Afro-Cuban traditions as they apply to jazz guitar. Naturally, Afro-Cuban rhythms feature prominently throughout the album. For example, "Caprichosa" finds Diamond fingerpicking tricky *son montuno* patterns on an A section in 7/4, transitioning into a bridge in common time—all with a deep harmonic language and an unerring sense of groove. In a different direction, on "Waltz Americana," Diamond works in more typical OM territory, playing a bright melody supported with open G- and E-minor-type chords, and "In Vain" makes apparent Diamond's prodigious flatpicking skills.

Musings and Origins was recorded entirely on a Collings OM2H Traditional, with its Sitka spruce top and East Indian rosewood back and sides, and the album serves as a showcase for the guitar's dynamic and expressive range, not to mention its warmth. On this beautiful outing, Diamond certainly makes a compelling case for the OM's role in modern jazz.

—Adam Perlmutter

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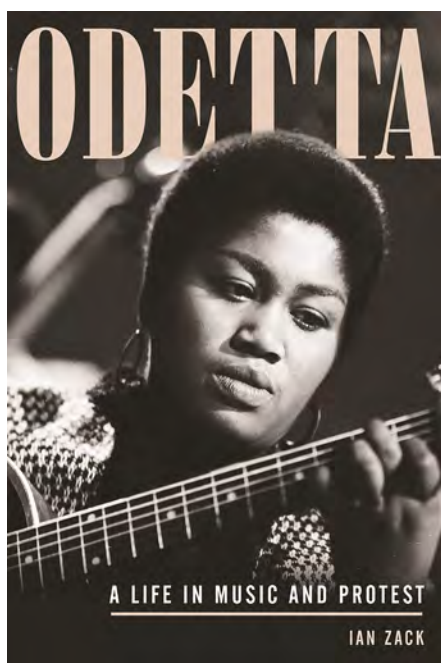
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**ODETTA:
A LIFE IN
MUSIC AND
PROTEST**

By Ian Zack
(Beacon Press)

Remembering the Queen of Folk Music

New biography spotlights singer, guitarist, actor, and activist Odetta

BY GREG CAHILL

“Unfortunately, there will always be a place for protest songs, at least until we human beings get our act together,” Odetta, heralded as the unofficial queen of American folk music, told me shortly before her death in 2008. “You can’t stop protesting or stop letting the powers that be know how you feel or give it over to them to stomp on you.”

For five decades, Odetta raised a powerful voice in support of social justice—and even death hasn’t silenced her. Ian Zack (author of *Say No to the Devil: The Life and Musical Genius of Rev. Gary Davis*) has captured her essence in an authoritative biography of the singer, guitarist, lyricist, actor, civil-rights activist, and cultural icon.

Her greatness can’t be downplayed. In the liner notes to her 1963 album *My Eyes Have Seen*, fellow singer and human rights activist Harry Belafonte wrote, “There are many singers with fine voices, great range, and superb technique. Few possess [Odetta’s] fine understanding of a song’s meaning that transforms it from a melody into a dramatic experience.”

Odetta’s commitment to protest songs, often filtered through the blues idiom, was unwavering and her interpretive skills dazzling. In his critically acclaimed 2005 film portrait *Bob Dylan: No Direction Home*, director Martin Scorsese prominently featured a 1960s vintage clip of Odetta singing “Water Boy” as an example of the folk scene’s vibrancy. In that footage, the very earth itself opens up when Odetta raises her powerful baritone.

Born in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1930, during the repressive Jim Crow era, Odetta Holmes landed in Los Angeles, where at 13 she began operatic training. Eventually, she became versed in gospel, spirituals, blues, and jazz, as well as classical music. In 1944, she began a career in musical theater, but got a professional boost in 1957 with the release of her solo debut, *Odetta Sings Ballads & Blues*. She was a big woman with a big voice

and often appeared in nightclubs accompanying herself on a big National resonator or a large dreadnought.

In the 1960s, she teamed up with guitarist Bruce Langhorne (known for his work with Joan Baez and Bob Dylan) and a bassist. During the folk revival, she ranked among the top tier of artists, along with Baez, Judy Collins, and Buffy Sainte-Marie, to name a few. Dylan has said she was a major influence; he borrowed the hammer-on technique she used on her first album. And she enjoyed a close working relationship with Belafonte—Zack fleshes out their relationship with numerous anecdotes. For example, when CBS TV and Revlon approached Belafonte about hosting a variety television show, a groundbreaking moment for a black artist, Belafonte insisted on bringing Odetta on board.

“Excuse me, Harry, but what is an Odetta?” one of the executives asked. “I said, ‘It is not a what. It’s a human being. It’s a she, it’s a who,’” Belafonte responded.

“And what does she sound like?”

“Paul Robeson. Her voice is enormous. And the depth and range of it is never-ending.”

“Uh, huh,” they said. “And what does she look like?”

“I said, ‘She’s a Nubian queen. She is the mother of history, of all of Africa. Her beauty reigns as supreme.’”

Reviewers loved Odetta—the United Press International heralded her as a star. She would go on to roles on TV, film, and the stage, and performed at such landmark events as 1963’s March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, at which Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his famous “I Have a Dream” speech.

Zack lingers long in the 1960s and ’70s, when Odetta’s career peaked and intersected with the likes of Dylan, Dave Van Ronk, and Josh White. In the process, he takes the reader behind the scenes to experience the life and turbulent times of an uncompromising artist and American icon.

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COURTESY OF LAURENCE JUBER

I Will

Laurence Juber unpacks his solo guitar version of the Beatles gem

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

When Laurence Juber arranged “I Will” for his latest Beatles album, *The Fab 4th* (reviewed on page 89), he had a problem to solve: what tuning and key to use. “There are plenty of tunes that fall nicely under the fingers in standard tuning, especially in the jazz repertoire, when one stays in guitar-friendly keys, rather than the horn player–favored flat keys,” Juber says. “But often, an accompaniment on a record that is married to the original vocal doesn’t easily translate to a self-contained arrangement in standard tuning.” “I Will” is one of two Beatles “White Album” songs on *The Fab 4th* that’s anchored by acoustic guitar on the original version—the other is “Julia,” which directly follows “I Will” on side 2 of the double LP.

“I Will” was originally in the key of F major, with a melody that sits relatively low in the guitar’s range, and a solo version would require the extensive use of barre chords—which would make it more difficult to make the melody sing. So, as he often does, Juber settled on DADGAD tuning, which he finds works well for combining the melodic and accompaniment elements specific to an original recording. “It could have worked in

DADGAD in F, but then I’d need a low C to reproduce Paul’s sung bass line. So I moved it to G, which gave me open strings for key melody notes and that low D bass note,” Juber explains.

While the Beatles song kicks off right on the vocal melody, Juber takes structural liberties and begins his arrangement with an adaptation of the guitar figure that appears between verses on the original recording. He plays it high up on the neck, exploiting the timbral difference between the ninth-fret and open Gs. “The voicings I use put that phrase in a different space from the melody,” Juber says. “I liked the contrast that picking figure provides, so I made it an intro, too. I also chose to repeat the bridge.”

On his previous Beatles albums, Juber has stuck closely to the original songs, but here he colors things with the occasional extended chord, like the six-note Dm7 that first appears in bar 7, the Am9 in bar 16, and the A9 and A7♭9 in measure 36. And he has lately been more inclined to further add his own imprint by allowing room in his arrangements for improvisation. He explains, “In the case of ‘I Will,’ it was about 90% set; the rest was performance-driven

while recording, so there are nuances that are never the same twice.”

As he does whenever he creates an instrumental arrangement of a song, Juber considered the narrative of “I Will.” He credits his wife, Hope Juber, for this approach, which results in performances that are more compelling to listeners. “Hope produces these albums, so she’ll push me to the point where I’m not thinking purely guitaristically, but telling the story. That informs the performance values—dynamics, groove, sonority, etc.”

It would be one thing to play this arrangement cleanly; it’s quite another to bring out the melody while maintaining an impeccable groove like Juber does. While the guitarist credits his remarkable rhythmic sense to 50 years of working with great musicians, he offers advice for this—or really any—contrapuntal arrangement: “Play it slowly, recognizing the patterns and how they are being articulated,” he says. “‘I Will’ is driven by the forward momentum of a melody that pushes into the bar while the bass anchors the downbeats. Getting that relationship right helps create the illusion of multiple players.”

AC

I WILL

WORDS AND MUSIC BY JOHN LENNON AND PAUL MCCARTNEY

Tuning: D A D G A D

Intro

♩ = 118

1. G6 Em7 Am7 C/D 2. Am7 C/D

Verse

G Em Am D G Em Dm7 G

1. C D Em Gsus2/D C D G6 Em7

2. Am7 C/D G6 G7 Bridge C D Em

Cont. on p. 96

Cont. from p. 95

Am9 D G7 C D Em

16 3 0 0 2 0 0 2 0 0 2 0 0 2 0 2

Verse

A9 D G Em Am D

20 0 2 4 4 0 0 0 0 0 2 0 0 3 0 0

Gsus2 Em Dm7 G C D Em

24 0 2 0 3 2 5 2 3 0 0 2 0 2 5 2

Bridge

C D G G7 C D Em

28 3 0 2 5 3 2 3 2 0 3 2 3 0 2 0 2 0 3

Am7 D G7 C D Em Em(maj7) Em7

32 3 2 3 0 0 2 0 0 2 2 3 2 3 0 2 2 0 2 0 0 2 0 0



Verse

36 A7 A9 A7 \flat 9 D G Em Am7 D

40 G Em Dm7 Gadd9 C D Em C G/B

44 C D Em C G/B C D Em Em/D C \sharp m7 \flat 5

48 C D E \flat maj7 G

*Produce harmonics by slapping 13th fret w/ pick-hand finger.

52 C D Em Am7 D7 G

Gurian S3B3H

**A classic steel-string
from a pioneer of the 1970s
lutherie movement**

BY GREG OLWELL

Luthier Michael Gurian (see page 38) is acknowledged as one of the earliest and most influential luthiers working outside of the big-name factories. He began building classical guitars in New York City, but he's perhaps best known for the steel-string instruments he and a team of fellow luthiers made from the late 1960s until the early '80s, in New Hampshire. Gurian offered several different models, the Jumbo, the 2, and the 3, which found favor with Paul Simon, John Renbourn, David Lindley, Bob Dylan, and Jackson Browne, among other big names.

With its wide waist, sloping shoulders, and curvy shape, the silhouette of a 3-style Gurian guitar is immediately recognizable. It might look like a jumbo, but with a 15.5-inch lower bout, it's closer in size to a 000. The 1973 S3B3H shown here features a Sitka spruce top with Brazilian rosewood back and sides. This steel-string incorporates elements from Gurian's nylon-string background, such as the combination of an ebony fretboard sans position markers and a rosewood bridge. It also sports a genuine ivory nut and saddle and the wooden binding that is fashionable these days.

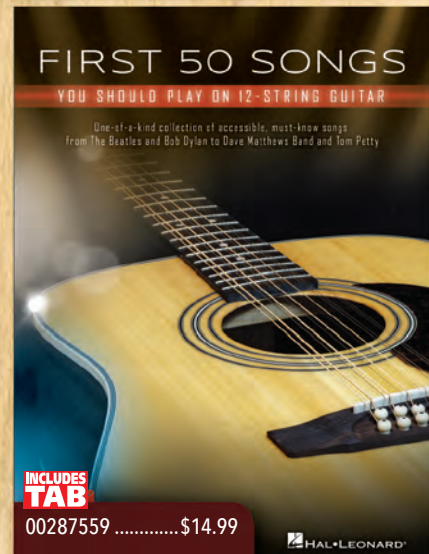
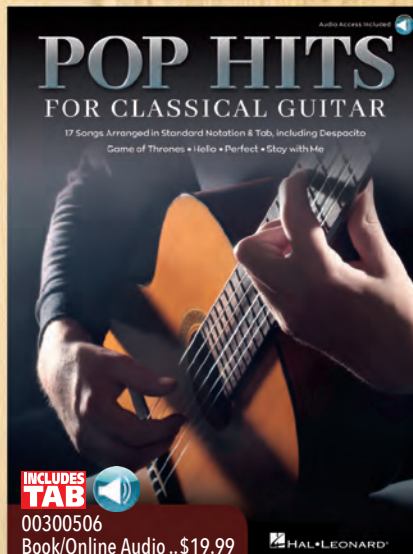
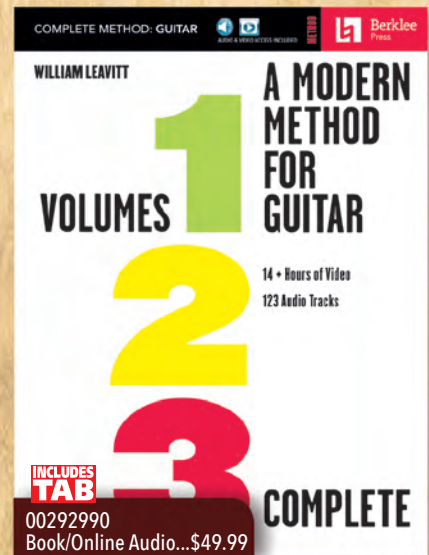
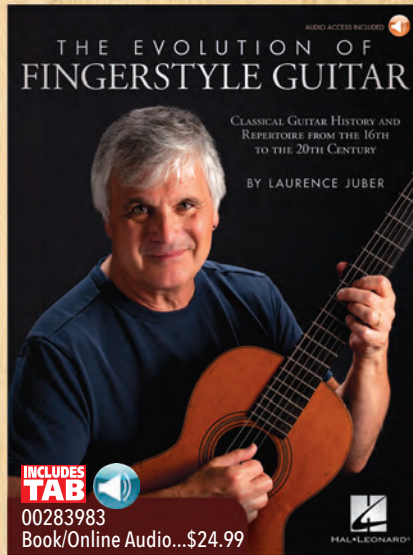
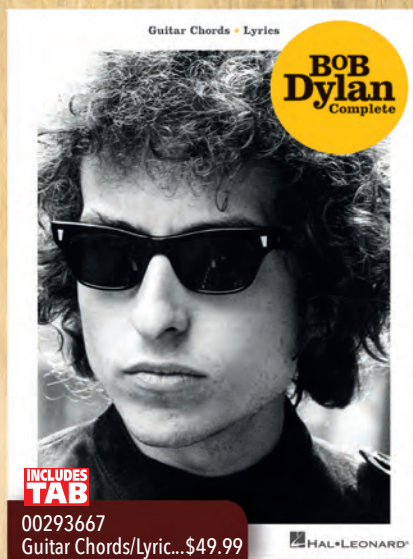
Following a 1979 boiler explosion that decimated all of the tooling, machinery, and over 200 instruments in his Hinsdale, New Hampshire shop, Gurian returned to building for a few years before economic realities brought an end to his career as a guitar maker. He's now retired, but his namesake company is staffed by woodworkers on a barge in Seattle's Ballard neighborhood, making tools and decorative elements for guitars (marquetry inlay and purfling, bridge pins and endpins, rosettes, inlay materials, pickguards, and fret files) and also providing custom woodworking and materials for furniture makers and boat builders.

AG



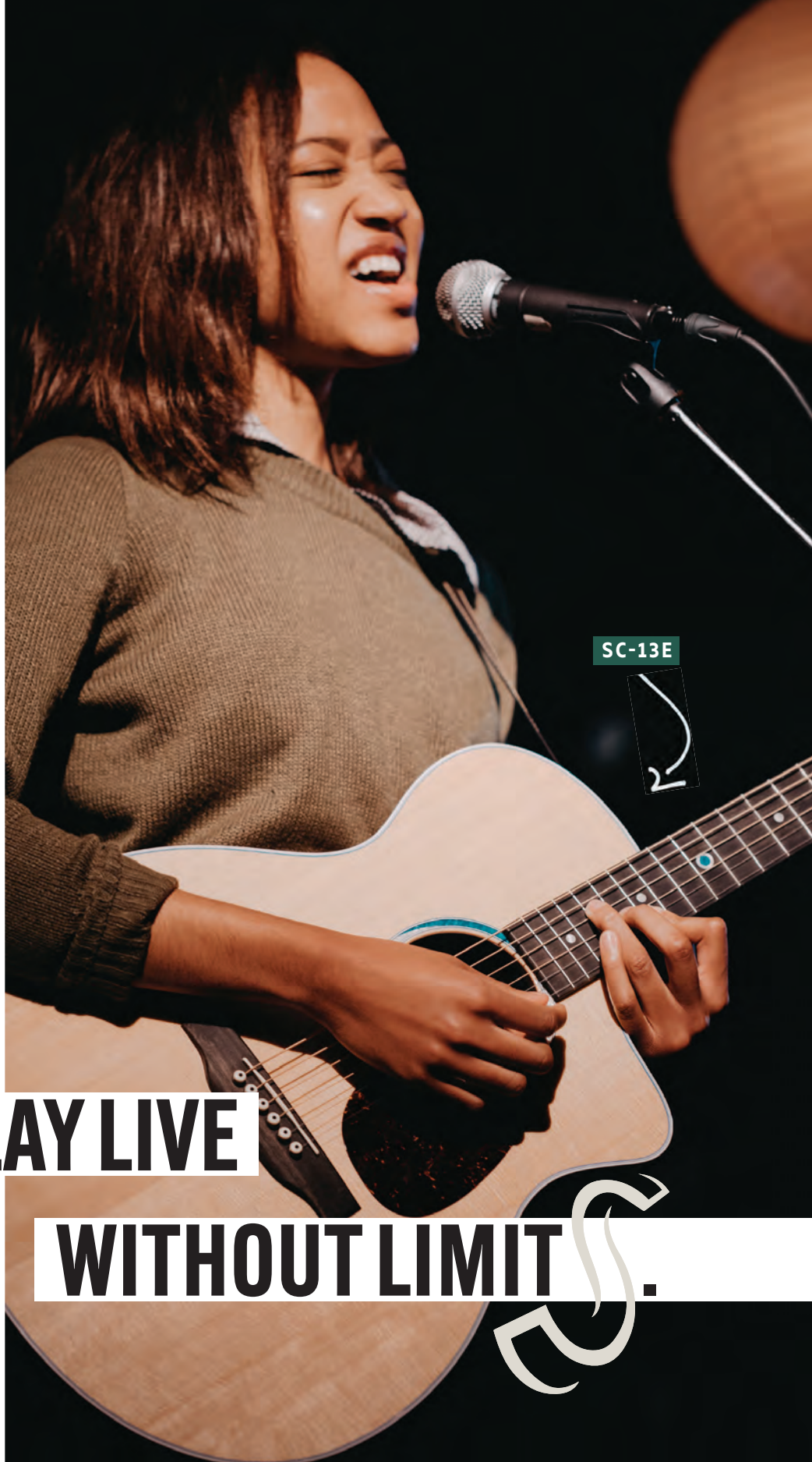
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